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BRAVE AND BOLD

A DIFFERENT COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK

No. 32

THE CHANCE
OF HIS LIFE
or The Messenger Boy
who got there —



BY HOWARD HASKINS

With a cry, the boy fell and disappeared in the depths below.

BRAVE & BOLD

A Different Complete Story Every Week

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1903, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C. STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 32.

NEW YORK, August 1, 1903.

Price Five Cents.

THE CHANCE OF HIS LIFE;

OR,

The Messenger Boy Who Got There.

By HOWARD HASKINS.

CHAPTER I.

THE LADY IN BLACK.

"If your message is of great importance you cannot intrust it to worthier hands than Lightning Lew," said the manager of the messenger company.

"What a curious name," said the lady in black.

"Well, his real name is Lewis Halstead, but he earned the nickname because he discharged all his duties quickly, and no obstacle can hold him back. You could find no one better suited to your needs. He happens to be out just now, but as he is always on time, you will not have long to wait."

"I want him to carry a message a great distance."

"Out of town?"

"Out of this country."

The other messenger boys at this came as close as they could to the speakers, for here was an unusual patron.

"Out of the country?" asked the manager, in some amazement.

"Yes, I want the boy to go to Japan."

There was a murmur from the manager, and a rustle of astonishment among the boys at this calm announcement.

The head of the office finally recovered enough to say:

"We are not used to receiving calls from the Antipodes."

"I suppose not."

"It is taking considerable responsibility to send a boy so far as Japan."

"Do you refuse, sir?"

"By no means; but the responsibility——"

"Shall be mine and the boy's."

"Ah!" interrupted the superintendent, "here he comes now. You can speak with him yourself, madam, and see what he says."

The door opened, and a tall, well-built boy of sixteen rushed into the office.

"Am I late, sir?" he panted, breathlessly.

"No," smiled the superintendent, "you are just on time."

"I was afraid I should be a minute or two late."

"Why?"

"I'll tell you, sir; but first let me give you my ticket, showing that I made about the best time on record to Harlem and back, considering that I had to wait nearly ten minutes."

"Very good, Lew," said the superintendent; "I see you are bound to live up to your reputation. But how were you delayed?"

"Well, sir, an old man fell down on Third Avenue, and a lot of boys were teasing him."

"Well?"

"Well, they thought that he was drunk, sir, but I saw that something more serious was the matter with him."

"What did you think ailed him?"

"I thought that it was a stroke of apoplexy. I drove the fellows off, called a policeman, and rang for an ambulance. All that took time, of course."

"I should say so. Well, you did well."

"Nobly!" interposed the lady, stepping forward. "You are the boy I want, for you are not merely a machine, but a human being, with human instincts and sympathies."

The boy gazed upon the speaker in surprise, and a quick flush mounted to his forehead.

"This lady is about to intrust an important message to us," ex-

plained the superintendent, "and she wishes you to deliver it. Are you willing to do so?"

"I will go wherever I am sent, sir," was the prompt reply.

"Anywhere?" laughed the superintendent.

"Certainly, sir."

"But the business which this lady wants transacted will make it necessary for you to visit Japan."

A momentary look of surprise appeared upon the boy's features, but it quickly vanished.

"Very well, sir," he said, quietly.

"Are you ready?" questioned the superintendent.

"I am, sir. Must I start now?"

The superintendent laughed heartily, and even the sad features of the lady relaxed into a smile.

"Not at this moment," said the former. "A trip of that length cannot be made at quite such short notice, and I do not suppose that you expect it, madam?"

"By no means," the visitor said. "But to-morrow morning——"

"So soon?" interposed the superintendent.

"It will not be too soon for me," said Lew. "I can start at very short notice."

For a few moments the lady gazed steadfastly into the boy's face, and a suspicious moisture dimmed her eyes.

Then she drew him aside.

When they were out of hearing of the others she said:

"You are called *Lightning Lew*?"

"That's the name the other boys have given me, ma'am," was the reply.

"But what is your true name?"

The boy hesitated a few moments, and a look almost of pain appeared upon his face.

Then he said:

"I do not know, ma'am."

"You do not know?" exclaimed the lady.

"No. It's a long story, ma'am——"

"I shall be glad to hear it," interrupted the visitor, "and you shall tell it to me, if you will, at another time. But about this journey. I gather from what you have said that you have no parents who will interpose any objections?"

"There is no one in the world," slowly and sadly, "who has any right to object."

"Then you," said the lady, "are like myself, friendless and alone."

"Friendless and alone!" repeated Lew, as he glanced at the elegant equipage that was waiting for his companion. "You, ma'am?"

"Yes, I," was the reply; "you cannot be more alone in the world than I. But enough of this. You say that you do not know your real name, my boy?"

"I do not; but I am called *Lewis Halstead*."

"Well, you have said that you are willing to take this message for me."

"I have, ma'am, and I am."

"Very good. Can you call at my house this evening?"

"I can, ma'am."

"No," exclaimed the lady, "that will not be necessary. Come with me at once."

A few moments later the other boys stared in open-mouthed amazement as he entered the carriage outside in company with the lady, and was driven rapidly away.

CHAPTER II.

LEW'S STORY.

During the ride, Lew's companion scarcely spoke. She kept her face concealed by her heavy veil, and once or twice the boy fancied that he heard a stifled sob.

In about fifteen minutes the carriage halted before a large, old-fashioned mansion on Fifth Avenue, not far from one of the busy uptown cross streets.

It was a house that had once been in the extreme of the fashion, but its style of architecture was now out of date, and the neighborhood was not affected by the ultra-fashionable.

But there were many of the old "solid" families residing in the vicinity still, and Lew knew enough of New York life and society to be aware that there was no more really "exclusive" set, in the best sense of the word, than that to which his companion in all probability belonged.

He sprang from the carriage, and with a gallantry that was in-born, assisted the lady to alight.

Then he preceded her up the steps of the mansion and rang the bell.

The door was immediately opened by an old colored man, who bowed deeply as the lady entered, followed by Lew.

"Wait for me in this room," said his companion. "I shall return in a few minutes."

The apartment she indicated was a small reception-room to the right of the hallway.

All his surroundings were of the costliest description, although a trifle old-fashioned. The taste displayed in their selection was exquisite.

"This is a queer enough call," murmured the boy. "What in the world can this lady want to employ a messenger boy to go to Japan for? I never heard of such a thing. Well, it's not my business to ask questions or to be curious. All that I have to do is to obey orders; but I can't help feeling a sort of personal interest in this matter. The lady has such a sweet, kind face that I can't help wishing with all my heart that the result of my journey will be to make her happier."

His meditations were presently interrupted by the sound of a footstep, and looking up, the boy saw a youth of perhaps eighteen standing in the doorway surveying him curiously.

Mutual glances of recognition passed between them, and the newcomer, a showily dressed, rather dissipated-looking young fellow, said:

"So it's you, is it?"

"Yes."

"You thought I wouldn't recognize you, I suppose."

"I didn't think anything about it."

"Don't you give me any back talk," snapped the young fellow, showing his teeth like a cur that is ready for a fight.

"I don't want to have anything whatever to say to you."

"You don't, eh? Well, maybe you'll have to."

Lew made no reply.

"You know," continued his companion, "that I've a little account to settle with you."

"Have you?" asked Lew.

The significant smile that accompanied this brief query enraged the young swell beyond measure.

"Do you know who I am?" he shouted.

"No," was the quiet reply, "nor do I want to know your name or anything about you."

"I'm Alfred Harwood—that's who I am! And now you know whom you have insulted."

He looked as if he expected Lew to faint at this announcement, but the boy only replied:

"I never heard of you before in my life, and I should be glad never to again."

"You—you don't know me?"

"No, I don't."

"I'm the son of the late Griggs Harwood."

"Who was he? I never heard of him," the other gasped.

Then he said:

"Now see here; what are you doing in this house, anyway?"

"May I inquire what business of yours that is?" asked Lew.

This was almost too much for Harwood. His naturally florid complexion assumed a fiery red hue, and he shouted:

"You want to know what business of mine it is, eh?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I'll tell you. This is my house, and——"

"Not yet, Alfred."

These words were uttered in a low, sweetly modulated voice; and turning, Harwood found himself face to face with the lady who had brought Lew there.

The color of his face became even deeper, if possible, as he stammered:

"I—I——"

"That will do, Alfred," interrupted the lady. "You may go."

The young fellow sneaked from the room like a whipped cur, not neglecting, however, to bestow a vindictive glance upon Lew as he left.

"Now," said the lady, as she closed the door, "I am afraid that I must commence with an apology for my young relative."

"That is not necessary, ma'am," said Lew, courteously.

"I fear that it is," smiled his companion. "The boy's training has not been of the best, and apologies for his conduct are frequently necessary. You have met him before?"

"I have, ma'am."

"I judge so from what little I heard of your conversation. When and where was your last meeting?"

Lew hesitated.

"Do not fear to tell me," said the lady, reassuringly. "I am certain that a relation of all the circumstances will only redound to your credit."

"Well, ma'am, it was about a month ago, on Fourth Avenue."

"Yes?"

"He was annoying a young lady, and I ventured to interfere."

"Annoying her? In what way?"

"She was passing along the street, and he spoke to her and insisted upon walking with her. She asked him to leave her, but he would not. I happened to overhear the conversation, and I——"

"Well, what did you do?"

"I knocked him down," replied Lew. "It seemed the only thing to do under the circumstances, ma'am."

"It was the right thing to do," said the lady, with evident enthusiasm, "and I respect you for it. But Alfred will never forgive you for the act."

"I don't think it makes much difference whether he does or not."

"You are right, my boy, it does not; and I am sorry to say it, for in that youth's veins flows the same blood that courses in mine; he is one of the few relatives I have living. But let us speak no more of him; other and more important matters should engage our attention. Your name, you have told me, is Lewis Halstead?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You have not yet learned mine. It is Warden. I am a widow."

Lew inclined his head respectfully, but made no reply.

"As you know," continued Mrs. Warden, "I have been most favorably impressed by you; but the message which I wish to intrust to you is one of the utmost importance to me, and I feel that I want to know you thoroughly, both for your own sake and mine, before I send you upon the journey. You tell me that you do not know who your parents are?"

"I do not, ma'am."

"Will you tell me something of your past life?"

"There is very little to tell, Mrs. Warden. I was deserted nearly sixteen years ago by my mother."

"Deserted by your mother!" interrupted the lady, tears dimming her eyes. "How strange that any woman can be so base as to throw upon the mercies of the world her child, her own flesh and blood! But perhaps I wrong your mother; it may be that the pressure of cruel circumstances forced her to the course she pursued."

"No," said Lew, sadly, "that is not so, Mrs. Warden. I was left in a basket at the door of a family named Halstead, in East Twenty-fifth Street, and pinned to the dress I wore was a note, saying that my mother did not wish to take the responsibility of my care any longer, and that any one who desired to do so could adopt me without fear that I should ever be reclaimed."

"Heartless woman!" murmured Mrs. Warden. "Well, you found friends in the family at whose door you were left?"

"Yes, ma'am, they adopted me, and gave me their name."

"And your foster-parents—are they still living?"

"No, ma'am, they are both dead. Mr. Halstead died ten years ago, and his wife about six years later."

"Had they no children of their own?"

"One son, who has been living in the West for many years."

"Then when they died you were again thrown on the world?"

"Yes, Mrs. Warden."

"And what did you do?"

"I got a place in a store and supported myself in that way, attending night school whenever I could. Two years ago I was given a position in the District Telegraph office, and I have been there ever since."

"And that is the whole story?"

"That is the whole story, ma'am."

She sighed and remained silent for some moments.

"Well, Lew," she said, presently, "you have told me your story; now you shall hear mine."

CHAPTER III.

THE PLOTTERS.

Lew gazed at the lady in surprise.

In his intercourse with the so-called "upper classes" he had always been used to brusque, unceremonious treatment, and it is natural that Mrs. Warden's air of gentleness and affability, and her offer to confide in him, seemed strange to him.

Perhaps his companion read his thoughts, for she said:

"The message which I am about to confide in you is fraught with such vital importance to myself that I feel that I ought to give you some idea of its nature. Listen: The name of the gentleman to whom I desire you to take the message is Marlowe—Ralph Marlowe."

The tenderness with which Mrs. Warden uttered the name, the soft light that came to her eyes as she spoke it, partially prepared him for what followed.

"He is a merchant in Yokohama," continued the lady. "More

than seventeen years ago I was his affianced wife. One day he met my sister. She was a year or two older and much more beautiful than myself. He became infatuated with her, broke his engagement with me, and married her. In a fit of pique I married a noble, kind-hearted man many years my senior, on the same day. In less than two years I was a widow and Mr. Marlowe a widower. Then he came to me and told me that he had scarcely known a happy moment since his treachery to me; that he had been mad to think he ever loved another. He begged me to forgive him, but I steeled my heart against him, and refused to listen to his impassioned pleadings.

"So be it, then," he said, at last. "I have been offered a lucrative position in a mercantile house in Yokohama. I shall accept it and start in two days. I shall never return, Eleanor, until you send for me. Perhaps you will do so some day. When I receive a message from you bidding me to come back to you, I will obey it!"

"With these words he left me."

"For years a struggle between my love and my pride went on, but love conquered at last. Two years ago I wrote to Ralph Marlowe, bidding him return. Since then I have written half a dozen times, but have heard nothing from him."

"He may be dead, Mrs. Warden," said Lew, who had been listening with deep interest.

"No," said the lady; "I have learned that he still lives. He has been prosperous, and is now one of the wealthiest merchants in Yokohama."

"I know his nature so well that I am absolutely certain that he has never received my letters. They have either been lost or intercepted by some designing person."

"Now, for years I have isolated myself from the world, and I have but few friends—certainly none whom I could ask to deliver the message which I am determined shall be placed in Ralph Marlowe's hands."

"Deliver my message faithfully, and you will find that I shall never forget it. There may be obstacles to overcome, for I am certain that enemies are plotting to keep us apart."

"If I meet with obstacles," said Lew, firmly, "I will overcome them. I will surely deliver your message, if my life is spared."

"I know that you will," said the lady. "I believe that Heaven has sent you to me, my boy, and that it will guide your footsteps."

She then went on to give Lew some instructions as to his journey which it is not necessary to repeat, saying in conclusion:

"Come here to-morrow morning at nine, and I will have a letter to Mr. Marlowe ready. You can take the ten o'clock train for Chicago."

"Very well, Mrs. Warden."

As he smilingly bade her good-morning, the lady started back with a low cry.

"Are you ill, ma'am?" asked the boy, in some alarm.

"No, no," replied Mrs. Warden, hurriedly, "but I— Well, I suppose I am foolish; but when you smiled your face took on such a striking resemblance to—to one I once loved—that I was absolutely startled for the moment. Go, go, my boy; I am ill and nervous, and the memories revived by that smile are far from pleasant."

Lew bowed and left the house, his mind full of his approaching journey.

Neither of the couple suspected that their entire conversation had been overheard by young Harwood, who had remained just outside the door, with his ear to the keyhole.

A few minutes later he rushed into another room, in which was seated a handsome, rather flashily-dressed woman of about forty, exclaiming:

"What do you think she's up to now?"

The woman looked up from the novel which she was reading, and said, in a languid, drawling tone:

"Well, and what is she 'up to now,' my son?"

"You saw that messenger boy come in a while ago?"

"I did; he must have gone away long since."

"He hasn't been gone three minutes. Do you know what he came for?"

"How should I know? Some trifling errand, I suppose."

"She is going to send that boy to Japan with a message to that fellow Marlowe."

In an instant the woman's air of weariness vanished. The book fell from her hand, and she demanded:

"But how do you know this?"

"I listened at the door, and heard all that passed between them. Oh, I know what I'm talking about! She actually told the fellow—a measly little messenger kid—that old chestnut about her lover affair with Marlowe."

"Can she suspect—"

"That it was you who intercepted the letters? No, I'm sure she doesn't; she imagines that it was some one on the other side."

He then repeated in substance what he had heard.

His mother listened attentively; when he had finished, she said:

"What is to be done?"

"Oho!" sneered the young man; "now that there's a prospect of squally weather, you're glad enough to avail yourself of my opinion and advice! Your cousin was a lonely widow; four years ago she invited you to visit her; you came, and brought me with you; we not only came—we saw and we conquered. You, too, were a lonely widow, and a mighty impecunious one, too. Mrs. Warden is in delicate health, and you have learned to look upon yourself as her heiress. And so you will be if you play your cards as well in the future as you have in the past. Of course, if she marries, that upsets all our plans. You pay the expenses, and I'll undertake to prevent the kid from delivering that message."

Mrs. Harwood grasped her son's arm eagerly.

"Alfred, I believe you can do it."

"Of course I can."

"It will be half a million in our pockets."

"You're shouting."

"Alfred, you shall follow the boy and gain possession of the message. In its place you shall substitute another letter, which I will prepare—I can imitate Eleanor's handwriting to perfection."

"You've got a big head, mother. Don't you worry—we'll work the racket to the queen's taste."

"I am sure I can depend upon you."

"You can gamble on that. I've got a personal grudge against the young fellow, and I'll just wipe that out at the same time. The game is as good as ours, mother."

CHAPTER IV.

EN ROUTE.

At precisely nine o'clock the following morning Lew presented himself at Mrs. Warden's residence.

The lady herself met him at the door and conducted him into the reception-room, where their former interview had taken place.

"I presume, Lew," she said, with a sweet, sad smile, "you consider me a very eccentric woman; most persons would. However, I am certain that, no matter what your opinion on the subject may be, you will faithfully discharge your duty."

"Indeed I will," said Lew, earnestly.

"Here is the letter," Mrs. Warden continued. "Guard it carefully, and place it in no one's hands but Mr. Marlowe's. Here are tickets through to San Francisco, and here is a check for a parlor car seat as far as Chicago."

"That is not necessary," said our hero. "The expense——"

"I want your journey to be a pleasant one," interrupted the lady, smilingly. "The expense is a secondary consideration. Here is money for your trip," and she handed him a roll of bills. "You will find the amount sufficient to cover everything. It will be well for you to communicate with me at different stages of your journey."

"I will do so, Mrs. Warden."

His companion went on to give him much kind, motherly advice, couched in terms which showed the boy that she felt a genuine personal interest in him.

At last she interrupted herself, saying:

"But I must detain you no longer, or you will miss your train. Go at once, and God bless you. Good-by!"

"Good-by, Mrs. Warden."

The lady held his hand in hers a moment, and tears dimmed her eyes. Then she turned away.

Fifteen minutes later he was in his seat on board the parlor car; in five minutes more he would be on his way to Chicago.

The bell which was the signal for the train to start had just rung, when a well-dressed young fellow, carrying a natty little handbag, entered and took a seat next Lew's—the only vacant one in the car.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, with an affected start of surprise. "Is that you?"

Lew recognized Alfred Harwood.

He nodded coolly, not over-pleased with the prospect of having the fellow as a traveling companion.

"Guess I owe you an apology," said Harwood. "The fact is, I was a little out of sorts yesterday. Open confession is good for the soul, you know, and all that sort of thing. Is it all right?"

"Oh, yes," replied the boy, shortly.

And he picked up a paper and began to read, not caring to continue the conversation any further.

"The fact is," went on Harwood, "you've seen me under a disadvantage, old man, and gotten a wrong idea of me. I want to set myself right in your eyes. See?"

"What difference does it make to you what I think of you?" inquired Lew.

"A good deal of difference. I don't want any one to misjudge me—particularly a good fellow such as I take you to be. The fact is, my boy, I've taken a fancy to you."

"You have, eh?"

"My Aunt Eleanor—Mrs. Warden, you know—was telling me about it this morning. What do you think of the business, anyhow?"

"I don't care to talk about it," replied Lew, coldly.

"Oh, that's all right, then. Very romantic woman, Aunt Eleanor. Well, I hope you'll succeed in your errand, but it's a queer notion, anyhow."

Lew picked up his paper again, but Harwood "chipped in" with his inevitable:

"I say!"

"Well, what do you say?" demanded our hero, making no effort to conceal the impatience he felt.

"Let's go to the smoking compartment. I've got a few good cigars in my pocket."

"I don't smoke."

"You don't know what you're missing, my boy. Well, I say."

"Go on."

"I've got a little flask of 1802 rye in my bag—it's the genuine stuff, too. Suppose we drink to our better acquaintance?"

"I don't drink," said Lew.

"Don't drink—don't smoke. Say, my boy, the first thing you know wings'll grow out on your shoulder-blades—see if they don't. You're most too good for this bad, wicked world. Well, I guess I'll go and take a smoke myself. Ta-ta."

And Harwood arose and strolled off to the smoking compartment.

When, after an hour's absence, he returned, apparently as good-natured as ever, Lew met his advances somewhat more graciously, and the two were soon engaged in an animated conversation.

Harwood was not destitute of tact, and our hero began to think that perhaps he was not such a bad fellow, after all.

"But I don't want to buzz you to death," he said, at last. "Want something to read? I've got a couple of the latest novels in my bag."

As he arose to take the bag from the rack in which he had placed it, a letter dropped from his pocket to the floor.

It fell with the superscription uppermost, and Lew saw, to his amazement, that it was addressed to Mr. Marlowe, apparently in the same handwriting as the letter which Mrs. Warden had intrusted to his care.

Harwood hurriedly picked it up, his face turning a fiery red.

He said nothing, nor did Lew; but the boy's suspicions were aroused—a fact which his face plainly showed his companion.

During the remainder of the day he said but little, but he thought a good deal.

In the evening the train stopped at a little way station to wait for an express to pass.

It was such a beautiful, moonlight evening that Lew thought it would do him good to walk about and get a breath of fresh air.

It would also relieve him for a while of Harwood's company.

He alighted from the car and strolled along the track until he came to a high bridge.

Far, far beneath he heard the faint murmur of a stream. It smothered the sound of stealthy steps close at hand.

Lew, peering down, suddenly felt a sharp blow from behind, reeled and fell into the depths below!

CHAPTER V.

"THE JOB TO-NIGHT."

It seemed to Lightning Lew that he was hours in falling before he struck the icy stream below.

Though at low tide, and rushing like a torrent, as soon as he rose to the surface he swam for the shore, and had just clambered up the bank in time to hear the not far distant conductor yell out:

"All aboard!"

Lew had no idea who had tried to kill him by hurling him off the bridge, but somehow Alfred Harwood he suspected, though that worthy was the principal one to assist him into dry clothes and commiserate over his adventure.

There was something about Harwood that went against our hero's grain, nor could all the former's politeness efface it.

When they reached Chicago, and found that there was a twelve-hour wait for the West, Harwood approached Lew and took his arm.

Lew, not knowing the city, was glad enough to have Alfred for a pilot, but he objected to a double-bedded room, which Harwood suggested, so they were assigned adjoining rooms.

When Lightning Lew was alone he tried the knob of the door that communicated with Harwood's apartment. He found that it was locked.

Lew then took from his pocket a small morocco case containing needles and thread and a small pair of scissors. This had been his companion for years, and in his lonely life since the death of his foster-parents he had had occasion to use it many times.

He ripped open a seam in the lining of his coat, and having placed the letter in this secure hiding place, sewed the seam again as neatly as he could.

"Now," he muttered, "I fancy that it will be safe from Harwood, or any one else who may attempt to rob me of it. And now I'll go down to supper—alone, if I can."

But he found Harwood waiting outside for him.

"Thought you'd be along soon," he explained, cheerfully. "I've got an appetite that I wouldn't take ten dollars for. Come on, old man."

There seemed to be no help for it, and Lew followed him, trying to look at the ludicrous side of the matter and keep his temper.

After supper, Harwood proposed a visit to the theatre, but Lew declined.

"Well, maybe you're right," was the response. "We ought not to be up too late if you're going to take an early train. Let's take a walk, then?"

"I don't care to."

"No? Well, I guess I'll go, anyway. S'long!"

And to our hero's intense relief, the fellow left him.

When he had been gone a few minutes, Lew started out on a walk by himself. He returned at about nine o'clock.

But as he entered the hotel a hand tapped him on the shoulder and a familiar voice said:

"Where are you going now?"

"To bed," replied Lew, laconically.

"To bed! Well, you are an early bird. I was brought up to late hours, and can't get over the habit. Sit up a while, won't you? No? Well, let's have a nightcap together—eh?"

"I have told you that I don't drink."

"Well, that's all right—I respect your prejudices. But you won't refuse to take a lemonade with me, anyhow?"

And seizing the boy's arm, he half dragged him into the café, all the time keeping up an appearance of the utmost good nature.

"Two lemonades, waiter," called out Harwood, "and put a big stick in one of them."

The lemonades were brought in due time.

"You ought to have a stick in yours, my boy," said he, as the drinks were placed upon the table at which they had seated themselves. "But I won't urge you, since you're such a strong temperance man. I say," he added, suddenly, "who's that?"

As he spoke he pointed to some one behind Lew.

The boy turned, and saw a tall, rather distinguished-looking man in the act of leaving the room.

At the same instant Harwood, by a quick movement, unnoticed by any one in the café, emptied a white powder, the contents of a small package which he took from a vest pocket, into Lew's drink.

"I don't know who it is," said the boy, turning to his companion. "Why do you ask me?"

"Well, I'm quite sure I've seen the man in New York, and I think he's some pretty well-known character. You A. D. T. fellows meet all sorts of people, and I thought you might be able to place him. Well, never mind. Here goes!"

He raised his glass to his lips, and Lew followed his example.

"That lemonade seemed to me to have a bitter taste," remarked our hero, as he replaced his glass upon the table.

"Yes, I noticed it myself. Lemon's a little off, I guess."

Lew arose.

"Going already?" asked his companion. "Won't you have another?"

"No, thank you; that one was enough for me."

"Yes, my young friend," muttered the other, as he watched the boy walk away, "I think it will prove enough for you. You'll sleep soundly to-night if you never did before in your life, for you've got a dose that would put a horse to sleep."

Before Lew had completed the ascent of the stairs—his room was on the floor above the office—he began to experience a strange feeling of dizziness.

"What's the matter with me?" he muttered. "I don't feel as if I could keep my eyes open. Perhaps that blow on the head that I got last night has affected me; or maybe it's because I'm not used to railway traveling. Let's see! Is this the room? Yes. Well, in a few minutes I shall be sound asleep—I don't feel as if I could keep my eyes open until I get my clothes off—and in the morning I shall be all right."

He inserted the key in the lock and the door swung open.

Entering the room, he struck a light. Then he perceived that he was in the wrong apartment.

Harwood's bag and umbrella lay upon the bureau; it was his traveling companion's room that he had entered.

He was about to turn out the gas and leave, when his attention was attracted by an open letter that lay upon the table.

Although the letter seemed to dance before his eyes, he slowly and painfully read as follows:

"MY DEAR MOTHER: I told you I'd succeed, and I shall. You may look for me at home in a day or two. I have followed the boy to this point, and the job will be done to-night. Rest assured that I shall——"

This was all that the sheet contained. It was evidently the commencement of a letter, and Lew could not doubt that he was the boy referred to.

But his dizziness was momentarily increasing, and he felt that it was of the first importance for him to get to bed.

Returning the letter to the table, he staggered from the room.

As, with difficulty, he relocked the door, a hallboy passed him.

In another minute he had regained his own room.

Having locked and bolted the door, he threw himself upon the bed without undressing.

"What is the matter with me?" he murmured. "Am I going to be sick? Nonsense! I will not think of it. After a night's rest I shall be all right. But what did that letter mean? What was it that it said? 'The job will be done to-night!' What job? I—I——"

The boy's tongue refused utterance; his eyes closed heavily, and he fell into a deep slumber.

It chanced that Harwood had been on his way upstairs when Lew was leaving the room he had entered by mistake, and had seen him close and lock the door.

He stepped forward and confronted the hallboy whom Lew had met as he left the room.

"Who was that in my room?" he demanded.

"Why—why, it was your friend," was the reply.

"My friend? What friend?"

"The messenger boy, sir."

"The messenger boy? Do you want to insult me? He's no friend of mine."

"No, sir."

"Certainly not—only a traveling acquaintance whom I met on the train, and who has stuck to me for some reason or other best known to himself."

"Is that so, sir?"

"I don't suppose there is anything wrong in this business; but as it looks rather queer to me, I will request you to remember what you have seen, so that you can testify if called upon to do so."

Harwood entered his room and lighted the gas.

"Yes, he has been reading the letter," he muttered, "or somebody has, for it's not where I left it. But what's the dif? Everything's going my way now. It was lucky the kid got into this room through mistake—I may be able to turn the incident to good account. Now, then, it is time to get to work."

He applied his ear to the door which connected his room with Lew's.

He drew a skeleton key from his pocket and fitted it in the lock of the door of Lew's room.

Then he stepped cautiously into the apartment.

He approached the bed, and thrust his hand into the inner pocket of Lew's coat, where he knew the boy kept his papers.

He drew out three or four letters, and hastily examined their superscriptions.

A shade of disappointment appeared upon his face.

"Not there!" he muttered. "I was sure—but there are plenty of other places where he may have put it."

There were a number of papers in Lew's pockets, and Harwood examined them all carefully, the expression of anxiety upon his face deepening.

"This is strange!" he mused. "What the mischief can the fellow have done with it? It isn't here—that's certain. Get onto the roll of bills, Alf, my boy. I'll count 'em."

He did so; then he uttered a low whistle, indicative of astonishment.

"By Jove! I should say that Mrs. Warden was liberal to him. She must be off her base to give a strange kid all this cash. He's struck a pretty soft snap. But what the mischief has he done with the letter? Perhaps it's in his valise; I'll soon find out."

In another minute he had emptied the contents of the small handbag upon the table.

He gave vent to a muttered oath.

He was beginning to be angry as well as impatient.

"Can't have lost it, can he?" he exclaimed. "No, that's impossible—he's too fly for that. It's here somewhere, and I'll find it, if it takes me all night."

At last he abandoned the search in utter disgust.

"What has he done with it?" he cried. "Must have mailed it to some point ahead, thinking, perhaps, that it would be safer than in his own keeping. But that don't seem likely. Am I beaten? No, by Jove! no! I'll not let this kid get the best of me; I'll follow him to the ends of the earth, but I'll have that letter!"

He paused suddenly as his eyes rested upon the roll of bills which he had taken from Lew's pocket, and which still lay upon the bed.

A covetous light gleamed in his eyes.

"What's the matter with raking in that pile?" he muttered. "It would come handy, and— But he'd suspect and accuse me. Hold! A great scheme. I have it now! I'll take the money—he can't go on without it. And as for being accused, I'll get the start of him. Yes, that's the racket!"

He transferred the roll of bills to his own pocket. Then he re-

stored everything in the room to the exact condition in which he found it, as nearly as he could.

He returned to his own room, and relocked the door. Then he sat down and finished the letter to his mother of which Lew had seen the commencement. In it he gave no particulars of what he had done, but assured his mother that the purpose of his journey was as good as accomplished.

The letter mailed, he retired to rest, but slept but little, so eager was he for the coming of the morning, when he anticipated the successful consummation of the vile plot he had formed.

CHAPTER VI.

A FALSE ACCUSATION.

Lew awoke the next morning with a violent headache.

His scattered faculties returned slowly, but when he finally realized that it was broad daylight, and remembered that he had intended to take the 6 A. M. train, he leaped from his bed in a sudden panic.

But he was so dizzy that he would have fallen to the floor if he had not clutched the mantel for support.

He placed his hand upon his breast at the spot where he had sewed in the letter.

A smile of satisfaction appeared upon his face.

"It's all right," he said; "if that was his idea he didn't carry it out. Now, then, to go down to the office and find out when the next train starts. And if I run across Harwood this morning I'll get rid of him if I have to knock him down. I've got quite enough of him."

He went at once to the office and procured a time-table, and was consulting it when Harwood came rushing up, apparently in a great rage.

"What kind of a house is this, anyhow?" he blustered.

"What do you mean?" asked the clerk, sharply.

"I mean what I say—that I want to know what kind of a house you keep?"

"You'd better moderate your tone," suggested the clerk. "We profess to keep a first-class house. What fault have you to find with it?"

"Well, excuse my excitement," apologized Harwood, "but I've been robbed."

"Of what?"

"A large sum of money and a little jewelry."

"Wasn't your door locked?"

"Yes; but that goes for nothing. I went out during the evening for a short walk. When I returned my valuables, which I had left in my bureau drawer, were gone."

"You were careless to leave them there; you should have placed them in our safe."

"Maybe so; but I didn't come here for advice."

"Do you suspect any of our employees?"

"No. I—hold!"

"What's the matter?" asked the clerk.

"An idea has occurred to me. I believe that I know the thief."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"And who is it?"

"There he stands."

And with a theatrical gesture the young fellow pointed at Lew. It was the first indication he had given of being conscious of the boy's presence.

"You accuse me!" exclaimed our hero.

"I do."

"It's a lie!"

"Is it? I have proof."

"What proof?"

"The testimony of that hallboy yonder."

"Will he testify that I stole the money?"

"He will testify that he saw you leaving my room at a little after nine o'clock last evening—and so will I."

"I went in there by mistake."

"That's a likely story."

"It is the truth."

"You'll have a chance to try to prove it."

"Now, see here, gentlemen," interposed the clerk, "we can't have any disturbance here. Perhaps this thing is all a mistake."

"No mistake about it," maintained Harwood. "My money is gone, and he has got it."

"But—"

At this point Lew uttered an exclamation of dismay.

At this unfortunate moment he had discovered the loss of his own money.

"What's the matter?" asked the clerk.

"I have been robbed!" gasped the boy.

"You!"

"Yes."

"Of what?"

"A large sum of money."

Harwood uttered a sneering laugh.

"That's pretty thin."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean to say that you have gotten up this yarn about losing your money simply to divert suspicion from yourself."

"It is false! Ah, I see it all now!"

"What do you see?"

"The plot against me, which you have contrived—this false accusation. It is I, and not you, who have been robbed. You are a villain, and I—"

Here the clerk interposed with:

"We can't have a row here. Let's have an end of this."

"That's what I want," said Harwood.

"Things look bad for this boy."

"I should say they did."

"And you are prepared to press the charge against him?"

"Most assuredly I am."

The clerk turned to a tall, plainly-dressed man in citizen's clothes, who had been standing near the desk, quietly listening to the entire discussion.

"Johnson!"

The stranger stepped forward.

"You'd better take this boy in charge."

"Good enough!"

The officer placed his hand upon Lew's shoulder.

"You must come with me."

"I am under arrest?" cried the boy, actually bewildered by the strange, unexpected situation.

"You are."

"But I am innocent."

"You have something sewed in the lining of your coat," said the officer, suspiciously.

His practiced hand had touched the boy's breast at the spot where the letter was hidden.

"I have, sir; but it is not his money—it is not money at all."

"You will have to submit to a search at the station."

"Very good, sir."

"Come along, now."

They started for the door, followed by Lew's accuser.

There was an expression of genuine chagrin upon Harwood's face.

"The letter was sewed in his coat," he muttered. "Fool that I was not to think of that. But I'll have it yet."

As they hurried along the crowded street, a feeling of despair seized Lew.

He could not conceal from himself the fact that the result of this affair might be something serious.

But his chief thought was one of deep regret that he would, in all probability, be unable to deliver the letter.

"I must—I will escape!" he murmured. "Nothing has ever yet prevented me from delivering a message, and nothing shall this time."

"What are you muttering about?" demanded Harwood, sharply.

Without replying, Lew, by a quick movement, tore himself from the officer's grasp and darted across the crowded thoroughfare, with his late captor and Harwood in full pursuit.

Luck was against his would-be captors.

A heavily-laden truck broke down, and a block ensued.

A moment later he had climbed across the broken-down truck, darted between two wagons, and gained the sidewalk.

After a slight hesitation, Harwood followed him.

"Nowhere in sight!" the young fellow growled, as they entered the street into which Lew had turned. "We've lost him."

"That don't follow," returned the officer. "He's had plenty of time to run this block and get into the next street."

And he started off, followed by Harwood.

Lew saw them pass the store he was in, pretending to be looking at a directory, at full speed, and knew that for the present he was safe.

A cable car came along, and he leaped upon the platform.

As he handed the conductor his fare, he remembered that it was all the money he had.

His last nickel!

What was he to do now? he asked himself, despairingly.

Suddenly he remembered that Mr. Halstead, his foster-father, had had a brother in Chicago.

He had once visited New York, many years before, and had seen and taken a great fancy to Lew.

The boy decided at once that he would hunt him up.

He jumped from the car, entered the first drug store he came to, and for the second time that morning asked to see the city directory.

He had no difficulty in finding Mr. Halstead's address. But here another disappointment and delay awaited him.

"He's out—won't be back for two hours, at least," said the clerk whom he asked if the proprietor of the store was in.

Lew's countenance fell.

Another two hours' "tramp," with the chances of rearrest—it was not to be thought of.

"I'll wait, if you please," he said.

It was nearer three hours than two before Mr. Halstead came in, and the reader can imagine how heavily the time hung on our hero's hands.

When he did come in, he was evidently in a great hurry. Lew recognized him at once, but he did not seem to know the boy.

"Mr. Halstead—" began the boy.

"Can't see you now!" interrupted the gentleman, brusquely.

"I am from New York, sir," began Lew.

"From New York?"

"Yes, sir; we have met before. My name is Lewis Halstead." The gentleman's face changed.

"Is it possible that you are little Lew, whom I used to see at my poor brother's house?"

"I am, sir."

He grasped the boy's hand.

"I'm glad to see you. I've often thought of you, but I should never have known you. You must excuse the unceremonious way in which I received you; I have been annoyed a good deal lately in one way and another, and I thought—but never mind that. Come into my private office."

Lew followed the merchant, a good deal relieved by the change in his manner.

"Take a seat, my boy. And now tell me what brings you to Chicago?"

"It's a long story, sir."

"Never mind," said Mr. Halstead, kindly. "I'll give you all the time you need. You're in some sort of trouble, I fancy?"

"I am, sir."

"Well, go on, and tell me all about it."

Thus encouraged, our hero proceeded to tell his story.

Mr. Halstead listened attentively. When the boy had finished, he said:

"Well, it must be confessed that you are in a rather bad box, but there may be some way out of it. It is a singular errand that you are on—essentially a woman's notion. This lady is determined to have her message delivered, and she will have it delivered—depend upon that. I've no doubt that it was this fellow Harwood who robbed you, but it might be a very difficult matter to prove his guilt. I have an idea—you shall telegraph to Mrs. Warden, telling her the whole story."

"I have no money, sir."

"I'll loan you some, and I will also help you prepare a telegram giving the story of the robbery in the fewest possible words. We will request a reply, and by it you must be governed."

Mr. Halstead spent half an hour in preparing the telegram, which was then dispatched immediately.

In a little more than an hour the reply came:

"Do not let the loss of the money disturb you. Will send you more by telegraph to-day. Then go on at once."

"ELEANOR WARDEN."

CHAPTER VII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

"A woman all over," pleasantly laughed Mr. Halstead. "Well, it's about what I expected she'd do. I congratulate you upon having so completely won the lady's confidence and esteem. Her friendship may be of great value to you in the future—particularly if you succeed in your mission. Well, now, what do you propose to do?"

"Start off as soon as I get the money, sir."

"Exactly; but in the meantime you may as well go home to dinner with me. It's unlucky that this charge of theft is hanging over you, for of course there's a chance that you may be re-arrested. But you shall go with me in my carriage, where you will be secure from observation. The carriage will be here in about half an hour, and before it comes I have some important letters to write. There's the morning paper; see if you can't find something in it to interest you while I write."

Lew picked up the paper, and was about to commence its perusal, when two persons passed the window, the sight of whom caused him to utter an involuntary exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. Halstead, looking up.

"Those two men!" exclaimed Lew. "They are Harwood and

the officer who arrested me. They have entered the store, sir; they have tracked me to this place."

There was a tap upon the door of the private office.

Lew gazed about him, almost in a panic.

There was no way of exit from the place, except by the door through which he had entered, and before which the detective now stood.

"Don't be alarmed, my boy; I'll stand by you. Step behind that screen yonder, and keep very quiet."

Lew obeyed.

As soon as he was hidden, the merchant called out:

"Come in!"

The detective entered.

Gazing about him, with a look of surprise, he said:

"Good-morning! I did not suppose that you were alone. I imagined that I heard voices."

"Indeed, Mr. Johnson?" returned the merchant, politely.

"Yes; but it was evidently my fancy. The fact is, I'm rattled this morning."

"Rattled?"

"Yes—all broken up. I had a prisoner escape from me three or four hours ago, and ever since that time I have been followed about by his accuser, who is the greatest bore I ever met outside of the oil regions."

"That young chap who came in with you?"

"Yes. He accused a lad of robbing him. I arrested the boy, but, as I said, he escaped while on the way to the station, and ever since then this young fellow, who is from New York, has been at my heels trying to hunt the boy down. The whole thing looks to me like a conspiracy on the part of this New Yorker. I really couldn't shake the fellow, and had to bring him here with me; but of course all this does not interest you, Mr. Halstead; let us proceed to business."

The officer then went on to make his report. At the expiration of five minutes he arose to go.

At this moment the door of the office was suddenly flung open, and Harwood rushed in.

His face gave evidence of great excitement, and he cried:

"We've got him at last!"

"Got whom?" demanded the detective, with a scowl.

"The messenger, of course."

"See here," interrupted the officer, angrily, "are you crazy?"

"No, I am not."

"What do you mean by rushing into a gentleman's private office in this manner?"

"Because the boy is here."

"Don't you see that he isn't here?" demanded the officer.

"I'll bet you ten to one that he is. Maybe he's behind this affair," and he stepped forward and placed his hand upon the screen behind which Lew was standing.

In another moment the boy would have been revealed had not the detective caught Harwood by the collar and pulled him back with considerable force, saying:

"See here, this thing has gone far enough. The boy is not in this office. I want you to distinctly understand, my fine fellow, that I haven't been on the force fifteen years without gaining enough experience to enable me to see through your little game. You have some grudge against this lad, and if I'm not greatly mistaken this charge that you have made against him is a false one."

Harwood sneaked out, without a word.

The detective turned to Mr. Halstead with a faint smile.

"Sorry to make a scene in your office, sir, but I've taken a particular dislike to that young man. Good-day."

And he left the office without another word.
 "Come out now, Lew," said the merchant, as he secured the door. "You look rather pale and excited," he went on, "but no wonder; it was a rather trying experience. If Harwood had gone a step further, you would have been lost."

Our hero followed the merchant from the store, but not without some trepidation.

Alfred Harwood was, however, on the watch. He had left in a white heat of rage, although he was too cowardly to hold his own and maintain the position he had assumed.

He entered a groggery on the opposite side of the way, and, having partaken of a stiff "horn" of whiskey, stationed himself near the door, where he could see every one who entered or left the merchant's establishment.

He did not have long to wait.

In about five minutes, as we have seen, Lew and Mr. Halstead left the store and entered the carriage.

A cab passed the saloon. Harwood rushed out and hailed it.

"Do you see that carriage on the next block, driver?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you follow it?"

"Of course I can, sir."

"Do so, then; but be very careful not to let them suspect that you are shadowing them."

"I'm fly enough for that, sir."

Harwood leaped into the cab, and the driver whipped up his horses.

At the expiration of about twenty minutes the vehicle stopped.

"Where are they?" asked Harwood, excitedly, poking his head out of the window.

"On the next block. I didn't want to go too near."

"Whose house is it?"

"I don't know."

Harwood asked the same question of a passer-by, and learned that the mansion was the residence of Mr. Halstead.

"I see, he's taken the boy home to dinner," he muttered.

"Driver, you wait here, and when they come out again, follow them as before."

"Good enough."

They waited for more than an hour. At the expiration of that time, Mr. Halstead's carriage, which had been driven away, returned, and the old gentleman and Lew emerged from the house and entered the vehicle.

"Now, then, don't lose sight of them," cautioned Harwood.

"I won't, sir!" responded the driver.

But he did.

Luck was against Harwood: Before they had gone a dozen blocks the cab horse stumbled and fell.

Considerable time was occupied in getting him up, and when he was once more on his feet the carriage containing the others was out of sight.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER DELAY.

With an oath, Harwood paid the driver his fare and started off on foot, for his horse was now limping badly, and could go only at a slow pace.

He was, perhaps, the maddest man in all Chicago at that moment.

On his way downtown he fortified himself with several drinks of whiskey, and when he reached Mr. Halstead's office he felt bold enough for almost anything.

"I want to see Mr. Halstead at once on important business," he

said, addressing the same clerk who had informed him earlier in the day that Lew was in the merchant's private office.

"You're just too late," was the smiling reply of the young fellow.

"Too late?"

"Just too late."

"How's that?"

"He's just gone out. They've gone out to buy some things for the boy's journey."

"His journey?"

"Yes," responded the loquacious clerk. "He's going out of town this afternoon by the 5 P. M. for Minneapolis."

"You are sure?"

"Certain."

"Thanks; I won't wait."

And without further ceremony, Harwood hurried from the office.

Once more he had changed his plans.

Lew was going West; he would follow him, and make another attempt to gain possession of the letter, which he now knew to be sewed inside the lining of the boy's coat.

When he reached the Palmer House, however, he found a long telegram from his mother awaiting him, which shed some light upon the mystery.

It was couched in the most guarded language.

"Make haste," the telegram concluded, "if you have not yet succeeded. E. is becoming suspicious. All will be lost if you fail."

"I will not fail," muttered Harwood. "This time I'll make a sure job of it. I will—I must; for if that letter is delivered, I shall be ruined; the fortune that I have so long looked upon as my own will slip through my fingers, and I shall have to go to work as a bookkeeper at a salary of perhaps ten dollars a week."

In a short time he had evolved a scheme by which he felt sure he could accomplish the mission intrusted to him by his mother, and at the same time satisfy his own private "grudge" against Lew.

The latter had reached the depot in ample time for the train with his companion.

Mr. Halstead lingered at the gate with his companion until almost the last moment.

"Well, good-by, and God bless you, my boy!" he said, at last. "I cannot help worrying a little about you, and I hope you'll write and let me know how you get along."

"Certainly I shall, sir," replied Lew, much gratified by the interest shown in him by the old merchant; "but there's nothing to worry about."

"I think there is, Lew."

"What, sir?"

"That fellow Harwood——"

"I'm not afraid of him, sir," laughed the boy. "I guess he's given up his pursuit of me as a bad job."

The train was already in motion when our hero leaped on board and sought his seat in the sleeping-car.

When he found it it was incumbered with the baggage of a man who sat in the next chair.

This individual was attired in an immaculate suit of black broadcloth, and wore a high "choker" and a white necktie.

He was reading a weekly religious paper, but he looked up, and said:

"Is this your seat, my boy? I beg your pardon, but I had supposed that it was disengaged. Permit me."

He removed his valise and coat from the chair.

His air of elaborate politeness somewhat surprised the boy, and he sat studying his face after he had again taken up his paper.

The stranger had the appearance of the conventional clergyman. He wore a brown beard, and his hair was plastered sleekly down upon his small, round head.

Lew fancied that he had seen him somewhere before.

Presently he became aware that the man was peering at him from over the top of his paper.

When he found that the action was observed, the clerical gentleman lowered the paper and said, with a smirk:

"Excuse me for staring at you, my young friend, but I cannot help feeling an interest in you."

Lew said nothing.

"You are, I see, a New York District Messenger boy."

"I am, sir."

"How happens it, may I ask, that you are so far from home?"

"I am out on a call."

"Out on a call? How very interesting! I had no idea that you boys were ever sent so far from home. Rather an unusual thing, is it not?"

"Rather, sir."

"And what is your name, may I ask?"

Lew told him.

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the gentleman. "I'm pastor of a church in New York. At present I am on a tour for my health."

Lew could not help thinking that it was a rather singular thing that the breath of a minister of the gospel should be so redolent of alcohol as was that of his companion.

Perhaps the clergyman read his thoughts, for he moved a little further away as he continued:

"How far are you going, my lad?"

"To Yokohama, sir."

"Is it possible? Yes, it must be that you are the lad sent away by my dear friend and parishioner, Mrs. Warden."

"That is the lady's name who sent me, sir."

"Indeed? She told me of her purpose, but I did not know that she had as yet carried it into effect. Mrs. Warden is one of the most prominent members of my church. Heaven grant that you succeed in the mission you have undertaken, my boy."

He continued in this strain for some time, and Lew, though he listened politely, could not help wishing that he would return to his paper.

Throughout the ride to Minneapolis the clergyman showed an apparently friendly spirit, and though he was sometimes annoyingly obtrusive, his intentions seemed to be of the best.

The journey was an uneventful one; but when Minneapolis was reached a disappointment awaited Lew.

He had expected to change cars, and continue his journey with only a few minutes' delay.

But when he inquired where he could find the train which he expected to take, he was informed by the employee of whom he asked the question:

"You can't go on to-day."

"Why not?" inquired the boy, in astonishment.

"There's a big strike on the road."

"When do you suppose trains will be run?"

"That's more than I can tell you," and the man turned away.

There was no help for it; Lew was obliged to go to a hotel and patiently await the adjustment of affairs.

Little did he imagine how eventful his stay in Minneapolis was destined to prove.

CHAPTER IX.

A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING.

When Lew left the depot, and in the company of the Rev. Mr. Mordaunt sought the Merchants' Hotel, had he seen the clerical gentleman remove his disguise when he was alone, he would have recognized the features of Alfred Harwood.

As it was, he suspected nothing, and finally sought his reverance for advice in his trouble.

"Alfred Harwood, whom you have come to regard as an enemy," said the Rev. Mr. Mordaunt, gravely, "is a very worthy young man, as I know him well. All the suspicions you have of him are entirely erroneous."

This after Lew had told him about Harwood, and his belief that he was being followed by that young man.

He left the room far from feeling satisfied with his interview.

As for Harwood, he lay back in his chair, shaking with suppressed laughter.

"Alf, old man," he said, "you ought to go on the stage; you have talents that would fit you to make a big success. The kid never tumbled for an instant. Well, if the strike is over and trains are to be running again in the morning, that job has got to be done to-night. It shall be, and I won't make a botch of it this time. I'm afraid that I can't get a chance to dose the boy, as I did before."

At nine o'clock Lew retired to his room, for he expected to take an early train, and wanted a long night's sleep.

Besides, he had a little task to perform before he went to bed.

For nearly an hour Harwood listened at his side of the door connecting his room and Lew's, and heard the boy moving about from time to time.

"Curse him!" he muttered; "what is he up to? Why don't he go to bed?"

He applied his eye to the keyhole, but it did not command a view of the part of the room occupied by Lew.

If he could have seen what the boy was doing, it would have made a considerable alteration in his plans.

Presently the light in Lew's room was turned out.

"Now," mused Harwood, "it won't be long before he's asleep; and then, if the letter isn't in my possession within ten minutes, I'm making a big mistake."

He waited nearly half an hour longer; then he cautiously and noiselessly drew the bolt that fastened the doors, and in his stocking feet entered the room.

The boy's quiet, regular breathing told the interloper that he was asleep.

The light from the other room illumined the apartment, and Harwood could see the boy's clothes carelessly thrown upon a chair.

He seized the coat and returned to his own room, muttering:

"At last! Let me see, where was it that the detective discovered the letter? On the right breast, I think. Yes, here it is."

He tapped upon the breast of the coat, and plainly heard the rattling of a crisp sheet of paper.

Examining the lining, he quickly found the seam that had been ripped.

He drew a penknife from his pocket and cut the stitches.

His breath came in quick, short pants; the color rose to his face.

"In another moment," he whispered, excitedly, "the letter will be mine, and then it will be out of your power to injure me."

He thrust his hand inside the lining of the coat and drew out the paper, which he hurriedly placed in his own pocket.

"Now, my fine fellow," he muttered, exultantly, "I have you!" With trembling hands, he placed the forged letter in the lining of the coat.

Then he returned to Lew's room and replaced the garment where he had found it.

Re-entering his own apartment, he bolted the door, and then sank down into a chair.

"By Jove!" he murmured, "my heart is beating like a trip-hammer! It's the first time I ever knew that I had such things as nerves. Well, the job's done. The kid won't discover it, for the opening through which I took the letter was a good deal smaller than the one in which he put it. And even if he should suspect that the coat has been tampered with and investigate, he'll find the letter apparently all right. And now, then, to take a look at this letter of Mrs. Warden's, and see what she has to say to this lover of hers."

He drew from his pocket the paper which he had gained possession of.

As he did so, an exclamation of astonishment, almost consternation, escaped his lips.

"Where is the envelope? It is gone! And the letter——"

He unfolded the paper.

A moment later it dropped from his nerveless fingers.

It was only a blank sheet. There was not even a line of writing upon it.

What did it mean? Was it possible that the detective had been mistaken, and that the letter had not been hidden in the lining?

"No, it's a trick!" he cried, fiercely; "the letter was there, and, by Heaven, I'll have it at any cost!"

He was right; it was a trick.

Lew remembered what the detective had said about the paper, and knew that Harwood had overheard it, and that he was shrewd enough to guess that the hidden paper was none other than the letter for which he was in search.

He believed Harwood to be a guest in this hotel; that he had followed him for the purpose of making another attempt to gain possession of the letter.

He therefore decided that he would find a new place of concealment for the precious document.

In pursuance of this resolution, he removed the latter from its hiding place as soon as he reached his room, and transferred it to the lining of the small valise which he carried.

While he was sewing up the rip in the lining of his coat, it occurred to him to put a folded sheet of paper in place of the letter.

As we have seen, the young plotter was caught in the trap laid for him.

"I'll have that letter if I have to kill him to get it!" he muttered. "Now, then, for another attempt."

With less caution than before, he re-entered Lew's room, and began searching the boy's pockets.

He turned out their entire contents upon the floor, and examined every paper with trembling hands.

"Not here!" he murmured, with a fierce oath. "What has he done with it? Ah, his valise; perhaps it's there."

A low cry of triumph escaped his lips.

"The lining has been tampered with—the letter is here! I'll bet fifty to one on it."

He drew a penknife from his pocket, and began to cut the stitches in the lining of the valise.

But scarcely had he commenced the work when he was seized and thrown violently to the floor, while a voice demanded:

"What are you doing here?"

Looking up, the astonished Harwood saw Lew standing over him, with clinched fists and flashing eyes.

The intruder's presence of mind did not desert him. Quickly deciding that, under the circumstances, strategy would be preferable to violence, he assumed a bewildered look, and demanded:

"Where am I?"

"You know well enough where you are, Mr. Mordaunt, or whatever your name is," replied the thoroughly aroused boy.

"Why, is it possible that I am in your room, my young friend?"

"I should say it was!"

"I know you do not understand the situation. The fact is, Lew, I am a somnambulist."

"You are, eh?"

"I am; and I must have entered your room in my sleep."

"And you emptied my pockets and opened my valise in your sleep, too, I suppose?"

"Is it possible that I have done these things?"

"See here," said the boy, decidedly, "this won't go down."

"Do you mean to insult me?" cried Harwood, trying to put on a look of indignation. "Do you insinuate that I, a minister of the gospel, have entered your room with any evil intent?"

At this moment the boy noticed that his companion's beard was slightly awry.

Then a suspicion of the truth dawned upon him.

He seized the beard, and before the intruder could offer any resistance, had removed it.

"I thought so!" exclaimed Lew. "Now, you scoundrel, it is my turn!"

"Is it? I guess not."

And the young fellow made a sudden lunge at the boy.

But Lew dodged the blow, and was about to give his assailant one in return, when the fellow suddenly turned and rushed into his own room.

Lew pursued him, but before he could reach the door Harwood had closed and bolted it.

Our hero touched the electric bell communicating with the office, and then began hurriedly dressing himself.

He was fully dressed when his ring was answered.

In a few words he explained to the hallboy that his room had been entered by his neighbor, and ordered him to summon an officer.

"I will stay here and see that he don't escape," he added.

"But he am gone now," said the bewildered darkey.

"Who is gone?" cried Lew.

"De clergyman."

Lew hurried downstairs, but he was too late.

It was now war to the knife between them, and the boy knew that he must be constantly on the alert.

He left Minneapolis soon after daybreak the next morning. At the depot and on board the cars he kept a sharp lookout for his enemy, but he saw no one who bore the slightest resemblance to Harwood.

If the young villain was still on his track, he was as thoroughly disguised as before.

The next three days of Lew's journey were comparatively uneventful.

Among the passengers were an old, white-haired gentleman and an extremely pretty girl, perhaps a year younger than Lew, both of whom—the young lady particularly, we doubt not—attracted Lew's attention.

Toward the close of the first day's journey the old gentleman, whom our hero had seen looking very attentively at him a number of times, entered into conversation with the boy, questioning him in the most delicate manner as to the object of his journey.

Both the old gentleman and his daughter listened with every appearance of interest to our hero's recital.

Nor were his companions uncommunicative.

Lew learned that the old gentleman was Judge Seabrooke, of Chicago, and that, in company with his daughter, Edith, he was traveling for his health, which had become seriously undermined by too strict attention to the arduous duties of his profession.

There was another of the passengers who made some attempt to cultivate an intimacy with Lew.

This was a youth of about his own age, but with a prematurely old face, who sat directly behind him.

But Lew received his advances so coolly that he soon desisted.

On the evening of the third day, while our hero was conversing with Judge Seabrooke, the hand of the youth we have spoken of was cautiously extended under Lew's seat. In another moment the fellow had gained possession of the boy's valise, and had substituted another, its exact counterpart, for it.

Nearly all the passengers were in the dining-room car at the time, and no one saw the act.

It was scarcely fifteen minutes after this incident that the train, which at the time was passing through a tract of mountainous country, came to a halt so suddenly that the passengers—most of whom had by this time returned from the dining-car—were almost thrown from their seats.

The next instant a party of half a dozen masked men, armed with revolvers, rushed into the car from the forward end.

"Hands up!" shouted their leader, and nearly every man in the car obeyed.

"Train robbers!" exclaimed Miss Seabrooke.

"Yes, miss," said the leader; "but we'll do our work nice and quiet, so don't you get excited. Gents, hand over your valuables."

The passengers meekly obeyed.

"Are you men?" cried the young girl, a flush of indignation rising to her cheeks. "Why don't you defend yourselves? You are two to one."

"You're a mighty pretty girl," said the chief of the gang. "Say, Bill"—to one of his band—"take her out of here. Carry her to our rendezvous. I've taken a fancy to her."

One of the ruffians seized Edith around the waist, and was bearing her, shrieking, from the car, when the old judge arose, and cried, in trembling accents:

"Is there no one here who will lift a hand to save my child?"

"Yes," cried Lew, springing to his feet, "I will!"

CHAPTER X.

A DESPERATE UNDERTAKING.

While the rest of the passengers were too cowardly to lift a hand in their own defense, to say nothing of that of the young girl, they could not help admiring the grit of the boy who stood up before the desperado and defied him as coolly as if such experiences were everyday occurrences with him.

And there was a look of involuntary admiration, too, in the ruffian's eyes, as he demanded:

"What do you mean, boy?"

"Just what I say."

"And what do you propose to do about it?"

Lew suddenly drew the self-cocking revolver that he had purchased in Chicago just before he left that city, and, leveling it at the ruffian's head, said:

"I propose to blow out your brains if you don't countermand your order to that fellow, and tell him to release that young lady!"

The judge sprang to his feet.

"Lew, my noble boy," he cried, in trembling accents, "you cannot save my child; do not imperil your own life."

The chief of the outlaws laughed loudly.

"Don't worry yourself, old man," he said; "we're not quite as black as we're painted. Let the girl go," ordered the chief.

The fellow who had seized Edith released her, and, pale and trembling with terror, she flew to her father's arms.

"Now, then, my boy," said the outlaw, "are you satisfied? If you'd been a man I'd have put a bullet through you before you'd spoken ten words. By Jove! I believe you are the best man in the train! I like you, young 'un."

Lew made no reply, not feeling particularly flattered by the ruffian's preference.

"Now, then," ordered the chief, turning away, "to work, men! Those of you"—addressing the passengers—"who haven't handed over, do so now. Be lively!"

The trembling and terrified passengers, mindful of the fate which had overtaken others under similar circumstances, who had dared offer resistance, meekly produced their valuables, which were pocketed without ceremony by the outlaws.

While this was going on, the boy who had stolen Lew's valise, as related in the last chapter, had quietly passed it over, unseen by any one, to a black-bearded individual seated just behind him; and this person now opened it and began ripping open the lining with a penknife.

This action was not lost upon the robber chief.

"What are you doing there?" he demanded, scowling, rushing forward and seizing the bag. "What have you got in the lining of this thing? Bah! nothing but a letter! Who is it addressed to? 'Mr. Ralph Marlowe, Yokohama, Japan.'"

Lew sprang forward in sudden excitement.

"That is my letter!"

"Yours, youngster?"

"Yes; that fellow must have stolen my bag."

"I believe you; he looks like a crook."

"It's a lie; the letter is mine!" shouted the strange passenger, in a voice that seemed singularly familiar.

"Say, come off!" interrupted the leader of the band. "Who and what are you, anyway?"

With a quick movement, he seized the fellow's beard. It came off in his hand, revealing the features of Alfred Harwood.

"I thought as much," sneered the outlaw. "Here, boy, take your letter," and he tossed it to Lew, who put it in his pocket.

Harwood glared at Lew, and his face turned white with rage, but he said not a word.

A shrill whistle sounded outside the car.

The robber chief started.

"The signal!" he exclaimed. "Come, all of you!"

As he spoke he gazed steadfastly at Edith. Then he suddenly sprang forward and lifted her in his arms, exclaiming:

"Now, then, my pretty one, you must go with me."

With these words, he started for the door.

"Halt!"

The voice was Lew's.

But he had scarcely uttered the last word when he was seized from behind by one of the band, and the weapon torn from his grasp. At the same moment he received a blow which felled him to the floor of the car.

For a few seconds he was unconscious. When his senses returned, and he arose to his feet, the robbers had gone, carrying Edith Seabrooke with them.

Lew gazed around him, a flush of indignation on his brow.

"Are you men," he cried, hotly, addressing the other passengers, whose blanched features were beginning to slowly assume their natural hue, "that you permit this crime to be committed before your very eyes?"

At this moment the train began to move.

"My daughter, my Edith!" cried Judge Seabrooke, faintly.

"Lost, lost to me forever!"

"No, judge, she is not lost!" exclaimed Lew, in a thrilling voice.

"I will save her and bring her back to you."

The next moment he had leaped from the car, which was now going at a good rate of speed.

Harwood sprang to his feet, and after a moment's hesitation, followed him, muttering:

"Now is my chance; I can't afford to lose it."

It was a strange, almost weird and uncanny, sight that met Lew's gaze as he leaped from the train, a sight so different from anything he had ever before beheld that, in spite of his solicitude for the girl he had undertaken to rescue, he involuntarily paused and gazed around him.

On one side of the railroad track towered mountains, thousands of feet in height, and by the light of the full moon he could see the band of outlaws passing through a rocky defile, perhaps a hundred rods distant.

On the other side of the track yawned a frightful chasm, produced by some terrible upheaval of nature in prehistoric ages.

He shuddered as he gazed down into those unfathomable depths, and turned to look after the fast-disappearing train.

As he did so, he fancied that he saw a dark form lurking in the shadow of a giant tree. For some moments he gazed steadfastly at the spot, and finally came to the conclusion that he had been mistaken.

The robbers continued their way up the mountain, the sound of their voices and laughter growing fainter and fainter in the distance.

Lew prepared to follow them. It seemed an almost helpless enterprise, this that he had undertaken.

He had pitted himself against this entire band of desperate men. How could he hope to accomplish his purpose single-handed?

The boy did not, however, stop to think of the chances of success or failure, but with the undaunted courage which is always half the battle, started in pursuit of Edith Seabrooke's captors.

But as he hurried along the railroad track, he was seized in a pair of strong arms, and a voice hissed in his ear:

"It's my turn now, Lightning Lew!"

With these words, his assailant began dragging him toward the brink of the abyss.

CHAPTER XI.

SAVED BY A MIRACLE.

"You won't escape me this time, my fine fellow!" Alfred Harwood panted, and his hot breath fanned the boy's cheek. "The old scores will be wiped out in a few moments. Do you know what I am going to do? I am going to toss you down that abyss. It's a clear fall of a thousand feet, and I fancy you won't be likely to annoy me much after that. But first——"

He thrust his hand into the pocket in which he had seen Lew place Mrs. Warden's letter, and possessed himself once more of the document.

"This time," he hissed, as he placed the letter in his own pocket, "I fancy you won't get it back again quite as easily as you have before."

By this time they had reached the very brink of the abyss.

"You villain!" Lew gasped. "Would you murder me?"

"Yes, I would! Didn't I tell you that it would be useless to resist me, that I would win in the end?"

He held the boy over the brink of the chasm.

Lew clung to him with the desperation born of his perilous position.

"Curse you, let go!" hissed the would-be assassin.

And by a quick, unexpected movement, he disengaged Lew's hold.

With a cry, the boy fell and disappeared in the depths below.

For a few moments Harwood stood staring down into the awful abyss, as if the victim of a horrible fascination.

Every vestige of color forsook his face, his eyes seemed protruding from their sockets.

Two men sprang from the shadow of a tree that he was about to pass and seized him. He immediately recognized them as two members of the band of train robbers.

He struggled to free himself, demanding, with an oath:

"What are you up to? Take your hands off me!"

"Weren't you on board that train?"

"The one that you went through? Yes."

"Disguised with a false beard?"

"Yes."

"And didn't you jump off the train after it had started?"

"Suppose I did—what then?"

"Just this, that we know who you are."

"And what do you think I am?"

"A detective; and you've made the biggest mistake of your life in trying to pipe this gang, let me tell you. It's been tried before, sonny."

"I had a job to attend to," he said.

"What kind of a job?"

"That's my business."

"That'll do, sonny. Come along, now, for we've got a smart tramp ahead of us."

So he accompanied them in silence, consoling himself with the thought that he would be able to convince the robber chief of his entire innocence of the charge brought against him.

In this conclusion he was slightly mistaken.

The kind Providence that had watched over our hero heretofore had not deserted him in this emergency.

As he felt himself falling down into the awful abyss, Lew abandoned hope, and resigned himself to the doom that seemed inevitable.

His fate would probably always remain a mystery.

Perhaps some day, when his very name was forgotten, his dry and bleached bones would be found, and men would speculate as to the identity of the unknown unfortunate.

These, and a hundred other similar thoughts, flashed through his mind in a few brief seconds with the strange rapidity which only circumstances of extreme peril make possible.

But the awful fate that threatened him was averted.

He had fallen scarcely fifty feet, when his progress was suddenly arrested.

His coat had caught upon a branch that projected from the side of the cliff, and the material being stout, it had not yielded.

The moon was hidden behind a cloud at the moment—intense darkness enshrouded the scene.

Lew dared not move, for the slightest motion might precipitate him into the abyss below.

He presently heard voices above him. One of them he recognized as Harwood's. To whom could the others belong?

As the reader is aware, they were those of the two outlaws who had captured Lew's late assailant.

The next instant the moon emerged from her hiding place.

As he gazed about him, the boy's heart sank.

Above, below and on all sides of him was an almost perpendic-

ular wall of rock, thinly covered with shrubbery. To reascend seemed utterly impossible.

But as his eyes became more accustomed to the dim light, he saw, perhaps ten feet to his left, what appeared to be a pathway hewn by the giant hand of nature in the solid rock—a road leading up to the summit of the cliff.

If he could but reach it, escape from the fate that threatened him might yet be possible.

There was one chance! There were numerous other branches and clumps of shrubbery projecting from interstices in the rock; perhaps by their aid he could reach the seeming haven of safety that presented itself before his eyes.

Yet the chance was a desperate one.

If the vegetation to which he clung should give way, he would inevitably be dashed to pieces on the rocks below, for a repetition of the fortunate accident that had saved him was not to be thought of.

On the other hand, to remain where he was meant a slow and horrible death.

Rescue was impossible, and he might hang suspended there for weeks, or months, or even years.

The adventurous spirit of the boy prompted him to have recourse to the former expedient, desperate as it seemed.

Breathing a prayer to Heaven, he seized hold of a stout branch and swung himself out into space.

The branch creaked and bent, but did not break.

For a second and a third time the boy repeated the perilous experiment, and then he landed in safety upon a rocky footpath that had evidently been trodden many times before by human feet.

His overtaxed energies now partially gave way, and he sank to the ground in a half-unconscious state.

In a few moments he had recovered his faculties.

Rising to his feet, he began slowly and cautiously ascending the nearly perpendicular footpath, murmuring:

"Now to find the robbers' rendezvous, and keep my promise to Judge Seabrooke!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE ROBBERS' RENDEZVOUS.

Arrived at the summit of the cliff, Lew gazed down into the black abyss from which he had been so miraculously rescued, and shuddered.

Then he looked eagerly about him. The robbers had disappeared up the mountain path; not a sound disturbed the stillness.

"I must not lose another moment!" murmured the boy.

And he started in the direction in which the robbers had gone.

A few minutes later he reached the rocky path by which they had ascended the mountain.

He was forced, however, to travel slowly, for the road was not only rugged, but dangerous. At many points a false step would have meant certain death.

An hour passed, and yet no sound of a human habitation. Doubts and fears began to assail the boy.

He might be on the wrong path. Were he to miss his way, he might wander about the mountains for days, and finally die of starvation.

To add to the difficulties of his position, the sky had become overcast with clouds, and he was forced to proceed slowly and with the utmost caution.

He had been ascending the mountain path perhaps a little more than an hour, when he stumbled and fell at full length.

The next instant he was startled to hear a loud voice demand:

"Who's there?"

Lew crawled to the side of the road and concealed himself behind a large rock.

He was just in time, for the next instant the moon emerged momentarily from behind the clouds, and peering cautiously from his hiding place, he saw two of the robber band approaching.

Each of them carried a rifle. They were evidently doing sentry duty.

"Who's there?" repeated the man who had spoken before.

"Oh, it's no one at all," said his companion, impatiently.

"But didn't you hear that noise?"

"Yes; it was some animal, probably."

"Maybe."

"Of course it was. There isn't a human being, with the exception of our people, within ten miles."

"I guess you're right."

"Of course I am. Now, then, Jack, give us the particulars of your scheme."

"You'll go with us, Bill?"

"Of course I will. I've stood about all of Darrell's tyranny that I propose to. We want a new chief, and you, Jack Hume, are the man for the position."

"Sit down here, Bill, and I'll tell you all."

The two men seated themselves upon a stone within four feet of the spot where Lew was.

"How many are there in the scheme?" questioned Bill, in a low, cautious voice.

"Twenty."

"Twenty?" exclaimed the ruffian, in a tone indicative of surprise.

"Twenty, counting yourself."

"Nearly half the band?"

"Yes."

"Do you expect to get more?"

"A few—two or three, maybe."

"The rest you think will stick to Darrell?"

"Most of them will fight for him, but they'll come over to our side in the end. There are a few that I'm pretty sure would join us, but I'm afraid to approach them, for if they should give us away it would be all up with us."

"That's so," and the ruffian shuddered as he spoke. "Darrell's a fiend incarnate when he's aroused, and if he suspected treachery he'd show the guilty ones no mercy."

"Bah! are you afraid of him?" sneered Jack.

"Well, he isn't a man I'd care to trifle with."

"You're like the rest, Bill—you look upon him as something more than human. But I don't fear him—no, nor any man alive. He's intimidated the entire band, and that's why they all submit so meekly to his exactions. But you mark my words, Bill, there won't be many in the band who won't be glad to be rid of him and who won't prefer me as a leader. There'll be a more equal distribution of swag, and there won't be any of this petty tyranny."

"I believe you, Jack."

"You may believe me. Now see here, Bill, as you know, you and I and Darrell are the only brainy men in the crowd—we and the old parson. The rest are mere cattle, who will do whatever they are bidden and allow themselves to be driven about like a flock of sheep."

"That's so."

"We have the advantage of education, and that's a big advantage anywhere. We can mold these people to our wills, once Darrell is out of the way. I will be chief and you shall be my lieutenant."

"I?"

"Certainly—that has been my plan from the beginning. Shake on it."

The two ruffians shook hands.

"But how do you intend to dispose of Darrell?"

"There's only one way—put a bullet into him at the outset. That's the first step."

"I guess you're right."

"Sure."

"But what about this girl that he took from the train?"

"She shall be mine. Do you know what Darrell's purpose in regard to her is?"

"No."

"Then I'll tell you: He means to make her his wife."

"His wife?"

"Yes. He took a big fancy to her from the moment he first saw her, and he's going to marry her. He has given her three days to consent, and at the end of that time, if she agrees, they'll be married by the parson."

"Is he really a parson, Jack?"

"Sure; he used to run a big church in 'Frisco before he took to drinking, but he's still a full-fledged Gospel-sharp, and can marry them as well as he could in his palmiest days."

"But the girl will never consent."

"Well, I suppose Darrell intends to force her to marry him if she doesn't. But he won't, for before the three days have expired, his carcass will be lying in the ravine yonder, and the girl will be mine."

"What shall we do with this prisoner of Darrell's?" questioned Bill.

"I don't know—make him one of us, perhaps."

"I wouldn't trust him; his face tells me that he's a treacherous cur."

"I think you're right there. Well, we can settle that matter at our leisure. And now I'll give you all the particulars of what I intend to do. But let us get a little further away from the cave."

"A good scheme. They say that walls have ears, and perhaps these rocks and bushes have, too."

The two ruffians arose and continued their way down the mountainside.

Lew remained quiet until their footsteps had died away in the distance, thinking of the conspiracy that had been accidentally revealed to him.

Then he arose and continued his ascent of the mountain.

It happened that he was very near the robbers' rendezvous; and that that rendezvous was a cave he had learned from the conversation he had overheard.

After about five minutes' walk the sound of voices reached his ear.

He now proceeded more cautiously.

In a few moments a sudden turn in the road revealed a scene that brought him to a sudden standstill.

Scarcely a hundred feet distant yawned the mouth of an immense cave, the interior of which was illumined by a dozen pine torches.

Around a huge table in the center of the cave were seated perhaps fifty men partaking of a rude but bountiful repast.

At the head of the table was seated the robber chief. In his hand he held a tumbler of liquor. His face was wreathed in smiles, he was evidently in the best of humor. He had just finished telling a story, apparently, and the cave resounded with laughter and loud expressions of approval.

Lew gazed upon the scene, which seemed as if it must have

been transplanted from one of Scott's novels, in breathless fascination.

He almost expected to awaken and find that it was all a dream.

But where was Edith? He saw nothing of her. There was one woman in the cave, a decrepit old hag who was waiting upon the table, but the fair prisoner was not visible.

But the further extremity of the cave was enveloped in shadows, which undoubtedly concealed her from view.

Fearing that some one of the revelers might chance to look out and see him, the boy was about to step beneath the shadow of a crag that frowned above him, when he was seized in a pair of powerful arms, and before he could offer any resistance, borne into the midst of the robber band.

CHAPTER XIII.

COMPANIONS IN MISERY.

As if by one impulse every man of the party sprang to his feet as Lew's captor hurried the boy into the cave.

"Whom have we here?" demanded the robber chief, frowningly.

"A spy that I found lurking outside."

"Why," exclaimed the chief, recognizing Lew for the first time, "it's the kid we saw on the train. How did you come here, boy?"

"I was brought here against my will, as you saw," replied Lew.

Two or three of the band laughed, but Darrell, the chief, only scowled the more fiercely as he said:

"Don't bandy words with me, boy. You followed us to this place."

"I did."

"You are a spy."

"I am not. I care nothing about the movements of you or your band."

"Then what is your purpose in coming here?"

"To demand the release of Miss Seabrooke."

Darrell laughed loudly.

"To demand it, eh? That's a word I don't like the sound of, youngster."

"To request it, then," said Lew, preserving the same quiet, imperturbable demeanor, although he knew he was in deadly peril.

"That's better," said the chief; "but I shall have to refuse your very modest request. The girl is mine. See here, youngster, you're the third person that has hunted out this spot. Do you know where the other two are?"

"How should I know?" asked Lew, looking the outlaw squarely in the eye.

"I'll tell you; their bones lie rotting at the bottom of a ravine not very far from here. They met the fate that is always accorded a spy. That fate will be yours."

"I am not a spy," said the boy.

"Perhaps not; but you've found this place, and you know too much to be permitted to leave it alive."

"You mean to murder me, then?" said Lew, in the same quiet, even tone that he had used from the beginning.

"You can call it that if you want to. Self-preservation is the first law of nature, boy. You're a plucky one, and I hate to do it—I tell you that frankly; but our rules demand it. Am I not right, men?"

"Ay!" shouted every man in the band.

"May I have a word with you?" interposed Lew, almost pleadingly.

"Yes, a dozen of 'em if you like," responded the chief. "Go ahead."

Lew went on with all the eloquence he could command to paint the agony of the bereaved father, so cruelly robbed of his idolized

daughter, the prop of his declining years, and ended by begging Darrell to release the girl and let her leave the place with him.

"I will promise you," he said, "that I will not reveal to a living soul the location of this cave, and that you will lose nothing by returning the young lady to her father."

"Are you done?" said Darrell, as the boy paused.

"Because if you are, let me tell you that, though her father offered as her ransom his entire fortune, I would not free her. Do you understand that? I love her—I loved her from the moment these eyes first rested upon her features," and the color arose to the outlaw's dusky face. "I have sworn that she shall be mine, and she can only return to her father as my wife—my wife, do you understand, boy?"

"She will never be yours," said Lew, resolutely.

"Indeed?" sneered the chief. "We shall see whether your will or mine prevails. Away with him!"

A fellow whom Darrell had addressed as Rob stepped toward our hero.

Out went the boy's right fist, and the next moment the ruffian lay stretched at his feet.

The movement had been so swift and so unexpected that it had been impossible for the fellow to make any resistance.

Lew rushed out of the cave and began the descent of the rocky path, at the top of his speed, closely pursued by a dozen of the outlaws.

But he had scarcely gone twenty feet when he stumbled and fell. Before he could arise he was in the strong grasp of Darrell.

"You're plucky enough," said the outlaw, "but you'll find that escape from this place is an impossibility. It was easier to get here than it will be to get away."

He hurried the boy back to the cave and repeated his order that he be bound.

In a few moments Lew's hands and feet were tied with thin, strong cord.

"Now," ordered Darrell, "place him with the other. Away with him! I've had quite enough of this."

The man who had bound Lew, a fellow of Herculean build, lifted the boy in his arms as if he had been an infant, and bore him through a long, narrow passageway, dimly illumined at intervals by pine torches.

The passage must have been at least five hundred feet in length, and it terminated in an apartment nearly as large as that in which the band of outlaws were assembled.

Throwing the helpless boy down with almost brutal force, the ruffian said:

"Now, then, youngster, I'd advise you to keep mighty quiet, for Darrell ain't in a mood to stand much more from you."

As he strode from the room, Lew was startled to hear a low cry only a few feet distant.

Raising himself upon his elbow, he gazed in the direction from which the sound proceeded, and was amazed to see Alfred Harwood lying in a similar position, and staring at him, an expression almost of horror upon his face.

"Is—it is you," he gasped, "or your ghost?"

"Yes, it is I," said Lew, quietly. "Again your schemes have miscarried. You did not succeed in murdering me, you see."

"Well, I'm glad of it," said the young villain. "I shouldn't want to meet the fate that threatens me with that crime on my soul. But how did you get here?"

"I came of my own accord."

"Of your own accord?"

"Yes, to rescue Miss Seabrooke."

"You were a fool."

Lew said nothing.

"Do you know where Miss Seabrooke is?" asked he.

"No."

"You have seen nothing of her since you have been here?"

"No. I haven't bothered my head about her."

"You will help me rescue her?" questioned Lew.

"Help you rescue her? What are you talking about? I look like rescuing anybody, don't I? Why, I'm bound so tightly that I can hardly move a muscle."

"Suppose I free you?"

"You! Why, you're tied yourself."

"I shall not be long."

"What do you mean?"

"You see what a sharp, jagged edge this rock to my left has? I believe that I can cut this rope with it."

In less than five minutes he had succeeded in severing the rope that bound his hands.

Then he drew a penknife from his pocket and cut the cords that encircled his ankles.

"Good boy! Now, then, just cut these ropes, will you? By Jove! the infernal scoundrels have tied them so tight that the blood can't circulate, and my arm and legs are numb."

"Remember," said Lew, "the duty that we have to perform."

"What duty?"

"The rescue of Miss Seabrooke, of course."

"Oh, that's all right! Don't stand there talking all night, but cut these ropes."

Thus urged, Lew performed the required service.

"Whew!" exclaimed Harwood, rising to his feet, "that's a relief."

"Now, then," said Lew, too solicitous as to the young girl's welfare to think even for a moment of his own peril, "to work!"

"To work? Ah, yes! Well, my boy, what do you propose to do?"

Before Lew could reply, a shriek, in a voice which he instantly recognized as Edith Seabrooke's, resounded through the cave.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I FORBID THE SACRIFICE."

"That was Miss Seabrooke's voice!" said Lew. "From which direction did it come, do you think?"

"From yonder, I fancied," said Harwood, indicating the entrance opposite to that by which our hero had been brought into the apartment.

"That's what I thought."

"Hold on! Where are you going?"

"Where am I going? To rescue Miss Seabrooke, if I can. Come on!"

"What chance have you got to rescue that girl? Not the ghost of one. And what difference does it make to you whether she is rescued or not? We'd better look out for ourselves."

"Coward!" began Lew, indignantly.

Lew waited to hear no more, but rushed off in the direction from which the sound proceeded.

Harwood, choosing another entrance, collided with a robber.

The next instant he was in the ruffian's grasp.

"So I didn't tie you tight enough, eh? Well, I won't make the same mistake again. Hello! the ropes have been cut. And where's the kid?"

"Gone."

"Gone, eh? Well, he won't go far—the entrances to the cave are too carefully guarded for that, I can tell you."

"See here," pleaded Harwood, "you could get me out of this if you would."

"Could I?"

"I have a thousand dollars."

"You have, eh?"

"Yes, and it is yours if you will get me out of this place."

"Do you mean it?"

"I do," said Harwood, certain now that his scheme was about to succeed. "What is your answer?"

"This!"

And the ruffian dealt Harwood a blow between the eyes, with brutal force.

Then, as the young fellow lay half unconscious upon the floor of the cave, he bent over him, and seizing him by the throat, demanded:

"Where is that thousand dollars?"

"Help, help!" cried Harwood.

In another moment the ruffian had possessed himself of the money.

"That's the idea," he said, complacently, thrusting the bills into his pocket. "What's the use of my risking my life to set you free when I can scoop in the swag just as easy without? Now you mind one thing, young fellow: Don't you say a word about this money to the chief, for if you do I'll tell a yarn that'll settle your case in about the quickest time on record. You're not in the East now, boy, and don't you forget it."

The fellow then proceeded to bind his prisoner again, even more tightly than before. This task performed, he strode off.

In the meantime where was Lew?

Following the sound of the voices, which momentarily grew more and more distinct, he reached the entrance of still another apartment of the cave, which, to his surprise, he saw was furnished with some attempt at comfort, even luxury.

Standing in the deep shadow of the entrance, he surveyed the scene in silence.

In the center of the apartment stood Edith Seabrooke, confronting, with tear-stained face, but flashing eyes, Darrell, the outlaw chief.

"Is that all you have to say?" were the first words heard; they were uttered by Darrell.

"It is," replied the girl.

"You hate and despise me, eh?" went on the outlaw, cynically.

"I do."

"And you insist that you will never become my wife?"

"Not for the wealth of the Rothschilds would I consent to be your wife," said the girl.

"If you do not consent it will make but little difference. But you will."

"I shall not."

"We shall see. The boy, Lew, who madly attempted your rescue on the train, is my prisoner."

"Your prisoner!" cried Edith, her face paling.

"Yes; he came here with the foolhardy purpose of taking you away, and, of course, failed."

"Noble boy!" cried the girl, fervently.

"You admire him, eh?" said the outlaw, with a cynical smile.

"How can I do otherwise?"

"Well, it's a matter of taste. But we need not discuss that point; his fate rests with you."

"With me?"

"Yes; he came here as a spy, and by the rules of our band should die. But I will save him on one condition and one only."

"And that is?"

"That you reconsider your determination; that you consent to become my wife."

Edith was silent. If Darrell spoke the truth, the life of the

youth who had imperiled his own for her sake was in her hands. Her beautiful face expressed all the agony she felt at the thought.

"Why do you hesitate?" pleaded the robber chief. "Is a union with me a fate so terrible? I swear to you, girl, that the love I feel for you is an emotion different from anything I ever experienced toward any woman living. From the moment when these eyes first rested upon your sweet face a passion entered my heart which can never leave it while life remains. Consent—for your own sake, not for that youth's—for I swear to you that I will make you happy. Your slightest wish shall be gratified; yours—"

Edith commanded silence by a gesture, and, gazing into her companion's face with an expression almost of loathing, she asked:

"How can I be sure you have told me the truth—that Lew is really your prisoner?"

"Do you doubt my word?" asked Darrell, frowningly.

"And you will take me to him?"

"I will."

"You will set him free?"

"I have told you so."

"And provide him with a guide to conduct him to the nearest settlement?"

"Yes."

"You swear this?"

"I do. And you?"

"Upon the conditions you have named I will be your wife."

Darrell sprang forward and was about to clasp the girl in his arms when Lew rushed into the apartment and stepped between them.

"Stop!" he cried, in a thrilling voice. "I forbid the sacrifice!"

CHAPTER XV.

LEW MAKES A BARGAIN.

Edith uttered a shriek. Then she rushed almost instinctively into Lew's arms, as if for protection.

Darrell uttered an oath.

"Boy!" he cried, "how came you here? Is it thus that my commands are obeyed?"

"Your men did their best," said our hero, "but I outwitted them, as you see."

"I perceive that you did," said the chief, surveying the boy almost with an expression of admiration. "By Heaven, you're a plucky one—almost worthy to be one of us."

"I don't consider that a very high compliment," said Lew, half sneeringly.

"Hush! Do not anger him," whispered Edith, fearfully.

"Bah!" said Darrell, overhearing her words, "what do I care for the yelpings of a young puppy such as he? Boy, you have been listening?"

"I have."

"You have heard—"

"Your contemptible offer, and Miss Seabrooke's noble acceptance of it. I would die sooner than accept freedom on the terms you have mentioned."

"You would, eh?" sneered Darrell.

"Yes, I would."

"Well, as it happens, you have got nothing to say about it. The matter lies between Miss Seabrooke and myself. You shall go free, and you will be guided to the outskirts of the nearest settlement by one of my men."

"If Miss Seabrooke does not go with me," said Lew, resolutely. "I swear to you that as soon as I reach civilization I will reveal

the location of this place, and guide those hither who will make you and your band suffer for all your villainies."

Darrell regarded the boy fixedly for a few moments.

"You mean that, do you?"

"I do."

"Well, I believe you; and I therefore revoke my promise."

Edith uttered a shriek.

"Lew, what have you said? Accept the freedom offered you and go—for my sake."

"For your sake I shall remain. I would accept freedom upon any terms except those this villain offers."

"But——"

"You will not have it upon any terms whatever now," interrupted Darrell. "My original intention toward you shall be carried out. This night, my lad, will be your last on earth."

"You do not—you cannot mean it!" cried Edith, her lovely eyes dilating with horror.

Darrell made no reply, but uttered a shrill whistle, in response to which two of the band almost immediately entered the room.

"Return this boy to the place from which he has escaped," said the chief, "and see to it that you guard him better this time."

The fellows seized Lew and hurried him from the apartment.

"Aha!" said Harwood, as the boy was again brought into the dungeon, bound hand and foot, "so you didn't get off after all, did you?"

His tone was one almost of satisfaction. Lew made no reply.

"There's no way of getting out of this place," continued Harwood. "I hadn't gone two steps before I was in the clutches of one of the band, who, before he left me, robbed me of every penny I had."

"The same money of which you robbed me," said Lew.

"Ha! ha!" returned the young fellow, not a whit abashed.

"Yes, and more, too. Well, it's all right. What use is the money to me now? He might as well have it as I."

Harwood continued in this strain, but as our hero made very few replies he soon relapsed into silence, and presently sank into an uneasy slumber.

Lew had formed a plan by which he felt sanguine that he should be able to obtain his release and the girl's.

At an early hour in the morning, one of the band passed through the apartment, and Lew hailed him.

"What is it?" asked the fellow, gruffly.

"I want to see your chief."

"You do, eh?"

"Will you ask him to come here?"

"I'll ask him, but he won't do it."

"Tell him that I want to see him on business of the greatest importance."

"I'll tell him, young un."

"What's your scheme?" asked Harwood, as the ruffian left the room.

"I have some information for Darrell," replied the boy, "by which I hope to purchase my release and Miss Seabrooke's."

"And where do I come in?"

"I will include you in the bargain."

"But see here, what is this scheme, anyhow?"

"Listen to my conversation with Darrell, and you will learn. Hush! here he is."

The outlaw chief entered.

"You want to see me?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, what is it?"

"I want to make a bargain with you."

"A bargain?"

"Yes. I want my liberty and that of this young man and of Miss Seabrooke."

"Indeed! A modest demand. And what do you offer in return?" sneered Darrell.

"Information of the utmost value to you—information that will save your life."

"What do you say, boy?"

"I have accidentally discovered a conspiracy against you."

"A conspiracy!" said Darrell, incredulously.

"Yes, a mutiny is in progress in your band. The traitors intend to take your life and put another man in your place."

"Boy," hissed Darrell, "if you are deceiving me——"

"I am telling you the truth," said our hero, looking him steadfastly in the eyes.

"By heavens! I believe that you are. How did you learn this?"

"From a conversation which I accidentally overheard."

"And the ringleader of this enterprise is——"

"You shall know his name when you agree to my terms."

Darrell paced the apartment, evidently in deep thought.

"I believe that you have told me the truth," he said, pausing presently. "I have suspected that something of the sort was going on. In return for this information you ask the release of your two companions and yourself?"

"I do."

"I agree to those terms. And now, the villain's name?"

"That you shall know when we are free."

"I cannot agree to that. You have my word that I will release you."

As he spoke, Darrell cut the ropes that bound both.

"Now," he said, "tell me the name of the traitor, and you and your companions shall be conducted safely from this place."

Lew considered a moment; then he said:

"It is Jack Hume."

"Jack Hume! the man I trusted most!" cried Darrell. "Come—come with me, both of you, and you shall see the fate that Darrell metes out to a traitor!"

CHAPTER XVI.

STILL ANOTHER HOPE.

Darrell led the two young men into a large room where the band were seated about a table discussing a generous meal.

"What's up, chief?" asked a powerful, dark-faced man whom Lew recognized with terror as Jack Hume, leader of the rebels.

"You may well ask," with an ugly smile. "I have come to punish a traitor."

Before any one present could fathom his intention the chief drew his revolver, and in another moment a bullet was buried in his enemy's brain.

As Hume fell to the floor of the cave, Darrell cried in a thrilling voice:

"Are there any others who wish to share this traitor's fate?"

As he stood there, his eyes flashing, his herculean frame drawn up to its full height, Lew could understand his power over these outlaws. It consisted in his remarkable personal magnetism. Although it would have been easy enough for one of Hume's followers to instantly avenge his murder, not a hand was raised; on the contrary, every face wore an expression of fear and apprehension.

"There are many who deserve it—that I know," went on the chief; "but I do not think there are many who will dare court it as he did. To those who were in this enterprise with Hume I will say go; leave the band if you want to; but if you remain here, it must be as my subjects. Now take your choice—go or

stay. If there are any here who are dissatisfied, let them say so now."

A dead silence followed.

"Let those who are true to me rise," said Darrell, a few moments later.

Every man in the room arose in his place.

The chief surveyed them with a grim smile.

"Among you," he said, "there are some who are traitors at heart, and who richly deserve the same punishment that has been dealt out to the man whose instructions they have been following. I know who they are; remember that, all of you. I shall watch them, and I have sources of information unknown to any of you. At the first symptom of a new outbreak of this mutiny I shall take decisive measures to protect myself and those of the band who are true to me and to our joint interests. But I do not expect any further trouble, for I give you all credit for knowing your own interests too well to make any. Remove that man's body, some of you. Throw it over the ravine—the fate he doubtless intended for me."

Two of the band bore the dead outlaw's body from the cave, the chief not deigning to bestow another glance upon it.

Turning to his prisoners, Darrell said:

"Return to your room."

"But you—you promised us our freedom," stammered Harwood. The outlaw laughed harshly.

"Did I?"

"Of course you did."

"Well, I've a very short memory."

"Do you mean to say," demanded Lew, hotly, "that you are not going to keep your word with us?"

"Well, that's about the size of it," replied the outlaw. "You've heard the old saying that a bad promise is better broken than kept; that's what I think in this case. You know too much to be allowed to leave this place alive."

"But," pleaded Harwood, with paling face, "we'll never give you away, you know. What motive could we have in doing so? I say, you've got to stick to your word, you know."

"Have I? Well, I will."

"You will?"

"Yes, my first promise to you that I would never allow you to escape me. This, my young friend, is your last day on earth, so make up your mind to it."

"Why did you promise us our freedom?" cried Lew, his eyes flashing with indignation.

"Why? Because it suited my purpose to do so—because I desired to gain the information you possessed."

"And Miss Seabrooke—"

The mere mention of the girl's name wrought a change in the outlaw's face.

"Have I not told you that I am going to make her my wife?"

"That shall never be!" exclaimed Lew.

"You think you will be able to prevent it, do you?" sneered the chief.

"I do."

"Well, then you'll have to make quick work of it, for within twenty-four hours you will die."

"I have always heard and believed that there was a certain amount of honor even among thieves, but you are a man destitute of the slightest claim to that quality."

"I say, don't get him mad," whispered Harwood.

"Bah!" cried Darrell, contemptuously. "I'll hear no more. Away with them!"

The two prisoners were seized and bound, and again returned to their dungeon.

"Well," said Harwood, despairingly, when they were alone, "our hash is cooked this time, sure. Our last chance is gone."

"Not yet," said Lew, in a low, cautious tone. "We have still another hope."

"Another hope!" exclaimed his companion. "What hope can possibly remain to us now?"

Lew hesitated. Ought he to confide in Harwood again? The fellow had proved himself treacherous in the past, but what motive could he have to be so now?

The other read his thoughts, for he said with every appearance of sincerity:

"See here, old man, you don't take much stock in me, I can see that plainly enough, and I don't blame you, for I haven't been square to you in the past. But things have changed now, and I give you my word that I'll stick to you."

"Until you have some reason to go back on me," rather bitterly.

"You wrong me, indeed you do, but, as I said, I can't blame you, for I haven't given you any reason to have a very high opinion of me. But maybe I'm not such a bad fellow as you think. Come, now, you've made some sort of a discovery, haven't you?"

"I have."

"Well, what is it? Out with it now! Perhaps I can prove to you that two heads are better than one."

CHAPTER XVII.

DARRELL'S WORST ENEMY.

"I can see no harm in telling you what I have discovered. Our interests in this affair must be one," said Lew.

"Of course they must," eagerly. "Go on, my boy."

"Should we be released through any efforts of mine——" began our hero.

"I know what you are going to say. You want me to promise that I won't bother you any further. That's all right, my dear fellow. I know when I have got enough. As soon as I get out of this place, if I ever do, you can bet your sweet life I shall make tracks for New York in the quickest time on record. No more of the Wild West for yours truly. And now go ahead with this great discovery of yours. Is it anything that you think will be of any help to us?"

Thus urged, Lew said:

"Did you notice that old woman who was crouching down in one corner of the cave while Darrell was addressing his men?"

"The old hag they called Meg?"

"Yes."

"I saw her. What of her?"

"Did you notice her when Darrell shot Jack Hume?"

"No."

"I thought not; and I do not think any one else did, with the exception of myself. But at that moment she half arose from the corner in which she was sitting, and seemed about to rush upon Darrell. The next moment she resumed her place, but there was a look upon her face which seemed to bode no good to Darrell."

"Humph!" commented Harwood. "Well, what do you make of that? What has that to do with us?"

"Just this: I watched her throughout the rest of the interview, and she knew it. I caught her eye more than once. When Darrell refused to release us she shook her fist at him, and there was a look upon her haggard old face that told me she was in sympathy with us."

"Is that all?"

"Not quite. When we were being taken from the room she

placed her finger to her lips, and gave me a look as much as to say: "Do not despair!"

"Is that all?" in a disappointed tone.

"That is all."

"Pshaw! Why, the old woman is half crazed. And is that your great discovery? Why, it amounts to nothing."

"You think so, do you?" said Lew, quietly.

"I do."

"Well, you have a right to your opinion. Think as you please. I may be wrong, but it is the only hope we have."

The other only replied with a growl, and for hours neither of the prisoners uttered another word.

The hours wore on, and the cave, which had been dimly illumined by an opening in the roof far above the prisoners, grew dark. Presently one of the band brought in a pine torch. As he placed it near the helpless captives, he said, with an evil, vindictive smile:

"It's the last light you'll ever need, either of you. The chief'll be in here to see you pretty soon, and you've seen how he does business," as he left them.

The evening was not far advanced when sounds of revelry began. It was evident that the outlaws were holding a grand orgy, perhaps to celebrate their chief's victory, and emphasize the renewal of their vows of allegiance.

"If they all get crazy drunk," said Harwood, apprehensively, "it'll be rough on us."

Lew shared his fears; but as the night wore on the outlaws became quieter, and soon after midnight not a sound disturbed the stillness.

"Well, I guess we're safe for the present," said Harwood. "They've evidently all drunk themselves stupid. Our execution is postponed until to-morrow morning."

He had scarcely uttered the last word when, with stealthy, cat-like tread, the old hag to whom Lew had referred darted into the room.

Her eyes blazed with a strange excitement as she approached the prisoners.

"Meg!" gasped Harwood, considerably startled.

"Ha, you know my name!" cried the old woman, in a harsh, croaking voice.

"I heard some of the band call you by it."

"Yes, yes. Well, boy," turning to Lew, "you understood the signal I gave you when you were borne away?"

"I think so," replied our hero.

"You thought that I meant——"

"That you pitied and would rescue us."

Meg laughed harshly.

"Partly right, and partly wrong. Pity is a feeling that has been dead in this breast many a long year. But nevertheless, I will rescue you all—you two and the girl."

"If you feel no pity for our condition," curiously, "why do you take this trouble?"

"Why? Because I hate Darrell and seek revenge."

"Revenge? For what?"

"For the murder of my son."

"Did Darrell murder your son?" cried Lew.

"Need you ask that? Were you not a witness of the foul crime?"

"I?" exclaimed the boy. "Why," he went on, a new light breaking upon him, "was Jack Hume your son?"

"He was my only boy. Oh, I will make that villain rue the day when he aroused my hatred. He sacrificed my son, but in the end his own life shall pay the penalty of the crime."

"If Hume was your son," asked Lew, "why did you witness

his murder without a word? Why did you not make some attempt to save him?"

"Why did I not make some attempt to save him?" cried the hag, scornfully. "Because I knew that one word from me at that time would bring his vengeance down upon my head, because I understood that my only chance for making him suffer for what he had done lay in keeping silent and biding my time. You do not know Dick Darrell! For years he has been the terror of the country for miles around. The members of his band have been unresisting tools in his hands—puppets which he worked as pleased him, and from whom he demanded the most implicit obedience to his will. Had I so much as opened my mouth this morning, he would have murdered me as he did my boy. I knew him too well to speak. No, no! I waited, for I knew that my time would come soon."

"See here," said Harwood, with some curiosity, "you seem to be a woman of some education, old lady; how does it happen that you are in this place?"

"It is too long a story to tell you now," cried Meg, wildly; "nor should the tale escape my lips if I had hours in which to tell it. Ah, those who knew me fifteen years ago, when I was the honored wife of a man far, far too good for me, would not know me if they met me now! But the past is beyond recall. By force of circumstances and my own folly, I drifted to this place, and my two sons with me."

"Your two sons?" repeated Harwood. "Have you another than the one who was killed this morning?"

"Yes," was the reply, "and a noble boy he is. He will aid me in avenging his brother's murder, of which he, too, was a witness."

"And he said nothing?" exclaimed Lew.

"No, no; he knew Darrell as well as I. But he will speak when the right time comes—have no fear about that. For months we have been plotting that villain's overthrow. Why, 'twas I who first planned the revolt against his tyranny, though Darrell regards me merely as an old dotard. Oh, I have played my part well, but the time when I shall throw off the mask has almost come."

"Well, see here, you said that you had come here to rescue us," said Harwood.

"And I spoke the truth."

"Then don't stand here talking all night. It seems that we haven't got any time to fool away."

Meg regarded him frowningly.

"I don't like you," she said after a few minutes' pause. "If you were here alone, you should meet your fate for all of me. I only intend helping you because you are his friend," pointing to Lew. "If he says so you shall accompany him; if not, you shall remain here. Speak, boy," addressing our hero, "shall I free him?"

"You mean," almost gasped the boy, "that you place his fate in my hands?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NEW PERIL.

"I do," said Meg. "Your face from the first aroused my sympathy; his my distrust. Will you do as I advise you?"

"What is your advice?" asked Lew.

"It is that you leave this fellow to his fate. Do not trust him. Take my word for it, you will be sorry if you ever have much to do with him. Still it shall be as you say. Speak now. What shall I do—release you and the girl, and leave him to his fate, or let you all go together?"

"Lew, old man," began Harwood, "I swear to you——"

"It isn't necessary to say any more," interrupted the boy, half impatiently. "Let him go with us."

"You have not decided wisely," said Meg; "but it shall be as you say. But too much time has already been spent in talk. Now to release the girl."

"Where is she?" anxiously.

"Darrell has her securely imprisoned, as he fancies," replied the old woman, grimly. "But I am in his confidence, and I can find her!"

She left the place, to return presently with Edith. Then she cut the cords of the prisoners.

"Have no fear of Meg," said Lew, as they embraced. "She has promised to save us all."

"But not for you sake," said the old woman, pointing to Harwood; "and now come, we are losing time."

"Who will guide us?" asked Lew.

"My other son," and she uttered a queer whistle, and a powerful young man entered, whom they recognized as one of the train robbers.

"Go," ordered Meg; "he will guide you safely. And you, Tom, hurry back, for we have work to do ere morning breaks."

"I shall be back in two hours or less," replied the youth. "Come," he added, beckoning to the three prisoners. "This way."

Edith attempted to utter a few words of thanks to the old woman, but Meg impatiently waved her away, and hurriedly left the room.

Their guide conducted them in an opposite direction to that in which they had entered the cave, and an entrance was soon reached.

Each of the three drew a long breath of relief as they emerged from the cave and stood once more under the canopy of heaven.

The moon was shining brightly, the scene was one of incomparable beauty and grandeur.

"Where is the sentinel?" questioned Lew. "I supposed that there was one at every entrance."

"There is, as a rule," replied their guide. "I am the sentinel at this entrance."

"Is there no danger that we shall be pursued?" inquired Edith, apprehensively.

The fellow laughed.

"Not much. The rest of the band, with the exception of a few men whom we know to be faithful to us, are not exactly in a state to do much pursuing."

"What do you mean?" asked Harwood.

"I mean that they're all drugged."

"Drugged?"

"That's what I said. The old woman did it; she put the stuff in their liquor, and they're sleeping about as sound as if they were what they will be soon—dead men."

"What they will be soon!" repeated Harwood, with evident curiosity. "What do you mean by that?"

"Isn't my meaning plain enough? There's going to be fun up there to-night. There'll be a brand new deal. I shall be chief, and—but all this is nothing to you."

"Oh," cried Edith, "if we should be followed in spite of all!"

"Don't agitate yourself," said Harwood, "I will protect you."

The outlaw burst into a fit of harsh laughter.

"You'd be a healthy protector. If-I haven't sized you up wrong, you haven't got spunk enough to protect a cat."

Harwood said nothing, but for the next half hour maintained a haughty silence. He was in bad favor with all hands, but he consoled himself with the thought that his turn would come soon.

The robber presently paused on the crest of a hill.

"You can see the railroad track shining in the moonlight away down yonder," he said. "From this point on the road is straight enough, so I'll leave you here. Good luck to you!"

Before either of the party could make a reply he darted away, and was immediately lost in the shadows.

"I'm glad he is gone," said Harwood, drawing a long breath. "We're a good deal safer without than with him. And now to make tracks for the railroad. Lean on my arm, Miss Seabrooke."

"No, I thank you," said the young girl, with an involuntary gesture of repugnance, as she clung closer to Lew. "How far is it to the railroad?" she continued, addressing our hero.

"Not more than fifteen minutes' walk," replied the boy. "Are you very tired?"

"Not very," was the reply; but it was evident enough to Lew that she was much exhausted.

"Keep up your courage," he said, gently. "We shall soon be safe once more. And now," he added, turning to Harwood, "I hope you have not forgotten your promise?"

"What promise?"

"To give me that letter without any further trouble."

"Oh, that's all right. Here it is."

Lew glanced at the letter and then thrust it into his pocket.

The next moment a rustling in the bushes behind them caused them to turn suddenly.

A sight met their gaze which thrilled the three fugitives with horror.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOST ON THE MOUNTAINS.

"So, then you sought to escape me! The traitor who was your guide is a dead man," and Darrell, the robber chief, smiled maliciously on the fugitives.

"It is you I want principally," and he drew Edith toward him. At that moment a shot rang out, and he reeled and fell.

"Who has done this?" asked Lew.

"I did!" and Meg, with flashing eyes, stood before them.

She bent over the dead body of the outlaw, and drew from one of his inner pockets a well-filled purse.

"Take this," she said, thrusting it into Lew's hand. "Take it," she went on, as the boy hesitated. "It is your own—yours, for it contains the money of which Darrell robbed you and your companions. And now, good-by, I must delay here no longer."

And without further ceremony the strange old creature darted away.

With a shudder, Edith gazed up into Lew's face.

"She is mad!" she whispered, "mad with the recollection of a misspent life."

"Undoubtedly," interrupted Harwood, overhearing the remark; "but there's some method in her madness, too. She's done the square thing by us, by Jove! even if she wasn't very complimentary in her allusions to me. But that's all right. And now, I say, let's be on our way."

Edith gazed tremblingly upon the ghastly, upturned face of the dead robber.

"It seems so dreadful," she said, "to leave him lying here——"

"There's no help for it," said Lew, gently, appreciating her feelings, for he shared them himself; "we must be on our way."

"Of course we must," added Harwood, with a coarse laugh, "we can't stop to hold a funeral service here. Bah! he's only reaped what he sowed, as the parsons put it. Come on!"

And he started to descend the mountain in advance of his companions.

"Oh, if he were not with us," whispered Edith to Lew. "I dislike him so much! I feel sure that his presence can only bring us misfortune."

"Don't agitate yourself," returned Lew, soothingly. "We shall soon be rid of him. In a few hours——"

He was interrupted by Harwood.

"I say, old man?"

"Well?" returned the boy, trying to stifle his impatience.

"The old woman gave you some money, didn't she?"

"Yes."

"How much is there in the purse?"

"You know that I have not counted it."

"You remember what she said—that the purse contained the money that was taken from us in the cave?"

"Yes."

"Well, about one thousand dollars of it belongs to me."

"Is that so?" asked Lew, a suspicion of sarcasm in his tone.

"Yes, that's so, my boy; and suppose you hand it over right now, while you have time and a chance."

"I'll wait," said Lew, quietly, "until I have a chance to count the money and deduct the amount that you stole from me in Chicago."

"Stole from you?" blustered Harwood, not liking to be put in this position before Edith. "What do you mean by such an accusation as that?"

"If you wish me to explain," returned Lew, promptly, "I will do so."

The young fellow was silent, but the look he gave boded no good to our hero.

"You shall lose nothing by me," went on the boy. "Before we part—which I hope will be very soon—I will give to you the full amount you claim, minus the sum of which you robbed me."

"See here," cried Harwood, fiercely, "I'll make you prove that!"

"You will make him prove what?" interrupted Edith, her eyes flashing; "that you are a scoundrel?"

"Yes."

"That, I should fancy, would be an easy task. One glance at your face ought to decide the question."

It was an ill-advised remark, and the expression upon Harwood's face showed that he felt the sting, and was about to resent the insinuation by a remark in the same vein.

But before he could speak the three fugitives were startled by hearing in the distance the cry:

"Help! help!"

Lew and his companions paused and gazed into each other's faces, forgetful of all save the strange and unexpected interruption.

From what unfortunate could this cry, uttered in a spot many miles from any civilized habitation, proceed?

"Some one is lost on the mountains!" cried Edith, forgetful for the moment of their own perilous position. "Oh, can we not rescue him?"

"Rescue him!" exclaimed Harwood. "Well, I should say not. It's about all we can do to look out for ourselves."

"We can at least try to attract him to this spot," said Lew.

"We know our way from here to the railroad and can guide him."

And placing his hand to his mouth he cried:

"Hello!"

The trio awaited the response breathlessly.

In a moment it came, and this time the voice was nearer.

"Help! help!"

Edith grasped Lew's arm and uttered a cry, almost of terror.

"What is the matter, Miss Edith?" asked the boy. "Calm yourself."

"Do you recognize the voice?" gasped Edith.

"No; do you?"

"Yes, Lew; it is my father's."

"Your father's! You must be mistaken," exclaimed our hero.

"I am not—cannot be—mistaken. Listen, Lew, and you will recognize his voice yourself."

CHAPTER XX.

"IT IS A FORGERY."

Lew listened, then darted away, to return soon with Judge Seabrooke.

Edith uttered a cry of agitation and alarm as her eyes rested upon her father's features.

He was indeed greatly changed. His face was pale and haggard; he looked ten years older than when they had parted. The eyes which gazed into hers wore a wild, vacant stare.

"Father!" cried Edith, springing toward him.

But there was no gleam of recognition in his eyes.

"Who is it that calls me father?" he cried, with a strange, hollow laugh. "I have no daughter."

"My God!" exclaimed Edith, "he is mad!"

"Do not agitate yourself, Miss Edith," said Lew, soothingly, in a low tone. "He is worn out with exhaustion and exposure, but I have no doubt that he will be himself again very soon."

"Who are you, girl," went on the judge, his eyes fixed upon Edith's face, "that call yourself my daughter? I had a daughter once, but she is dead now—lost, lost to me forever."

"No, no," cried Edith, tears streaming down her face, "she lives, father, she is here!"

"And do you thus make sport of an old man's misery?" exclaimed the unfortunate father, brokenly. "I tell you she is dead. I have been searching for her in these mountains for—how long is it? Months! Years! I could find no one who would go with me, and I went alone. But I could not find her; the wretches who stole her from me have killed her, and I shall soon follow her."

"No, no, father, she is not dead," exclaimed the girl, seizing him in her arms. "I am your daughter, your Edith; and here is Lew—you remember Lew, don't you, father?"

"The boy I met on the train?—the messenger?"

"Yes, yes."

"I remember him; but he, too, is dead. Oh, you cannot deceive me, I know all."

"You had better say no more to him at present, Miss Edith," interposed Lew, "your words only agitate and excite him. Come, take my arm, and let us be on our way."

"Sensible advice," commented Harwood. "Now, judge, lean on me, and I'll take you to a place of safety."

The old man obeyed, and the quartette began the descent of the mountain.

For some minutes not a word was spoken, except by the judge, who was muttering incoherently to himself.

Edith's stifled sobs showed how deep was her grief, but Lew felt how impossible it would be for him to offer any adequate consolation, and so said nothing, hoping that food and rest would restore Judge Seabrooke to his normal state.

Less than half an hour's walk brought them to the railway track.

"Now, then," said Harwood, "all we can do is to wait until a train comes along and try to signal it. Hark! I think I hear one now!"

They all listened.

At first they were unable to decide in what direction it was going, but in a few moments it became apparent that it was westward bound.

"Now," cried Harwood, excitedly, "how are we going to signal it? Lew, have you got a newspaper or anything of the sort that I can make a torch of?"

"Yes, here is a paper," returned our hero, "but I have no matches."

"I have half a dozen or so," said Harwood. "I'm a smoker, you know. Give me the paper, quick!"

"Here it is. Hurry! the train will be here in half a minute."

Harwood twisted up the paper and lighted it.

Just as it blazed up the train rounded a curve a few hundred feet distant, and approached the fugitives at the rate of at least fifty miles an hour.

Harwood waved the impromptu torch over his head.

The next moment a sharp whistle sounded—the signal for "down brakes."

The appeal for help had been seen and heeded.

The speed of the train rapidly diminished, and in a few moments it came to a halt.

The passengers came pouring out of the cars in wild excitement.

"What's the matter?" demanded the engineer, leaping from his cab and approaching.

In a few words our hero explained the situation.

"Well, bundle aboard as quickly as you can," ordered the conductor, interrupting him impatiently before he had finished his story. "We're half an hour behind time already."

"Come along, judge," said Harwood, attempting to lift his charge on board the train. "We have no time to lose."

But the old man shook him off, and, manifesting more excitement than he had yet shown, cried:

"I will not go! You are my enemy, not the friend you profess to be. I will find my child—dead or alive I will find her!"

And before either our hero or Harwood could detain him he had rushed away, and was lost in the darkness.

"Wait one moment," pleaded Lew, addressing the conductor. "I will find him."

"I can't keep the train standing any longer," said the official, who evidently possessed a very high sense of his own importance. "Do as you please, we must go on."

"Would you leave the old man here to die?" cried the boy, indignantly.

"All aboard!" shouted the conductor, ignoring the question, and giving the engineer the signal to go ahead.

The passengers began to return to their places, but at this juncture a voice cried:

"Stop!"

All eyes were turned to the speaker—a tall, portly, elderly man.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" demanded the conductor, brusquely.

As he flashed his lantern in the gentleman's face, Edith sprang forward, crying:

"Dr. Metcalfe!"

"Edith Seabrooke!" exclaimed the gentleman. "Is it possible? And who was that old man?"

"Did you not recognize him? It was my father."

"Your father! My old friend, Judge Seabrooke? How strangely changed. What does all this mean? But this is no time for explanations; a search must be made at once. Conductor, hold the train a few minutes."

"Certainly, if you say so, doctor," said the conductor, recog-

nizing the gentleman's name as that of one of the largest and most influential stockholders on the road.

At this moment Edith caught a glimpse of a shadowy form not far distant, and rushing forward, she cried, almost despairingly:

"Father, father!"

"Edith, my child, is it you?" came the reply, in weak, quavering tones. "Where are you?"

"Here, father, here!"

The next moment father and child were locked in each other's arms, and the tears were falling thick and fast upon Judge Seabrooke's sunken cheeks.

It was now an easy matter to induce the man to enter the train, which, a few seconds later, was on its way.

"The danger is past," said Dr. Metcalfe, soothingly, to Edith. "I will give your father a sedative, and when he awakens in the morning he will be almost himself again."

Bertus were provided for the four luckless travelers, and in a short time all their troubles were forgotten in sleep.

Lew and Harwood met in the smoking car at an early hour the next morning.

"How is the judge, old man?" asked the latter.

"I haven't seen him this morning," replied our hero; "but the doctor tells me he is sleeping quietly. However, that is not what I want to see you about; I have an account to settle with you."

"You have, eh? Ah, yes, you've got some money of mine in your keeping. Well, let's have it."

"That's not it," said Lew, uncompromisingly.

"Not what you want to see me about? What's the trouble, then?"

"I want that letter."

"What letter?"

And Harwood's face assumed an expression of astonishment.

"The letter which was intrusted to my care by Mrs. Warden."

"What are you talking about, Lew, old boy? Why, I did give you the letter."

"You gave me this," said Lew, drawing the envelope from his pocket; "but it is a forgery."

CHAPTER XXI.

"MY NAME IS RALPH MARLOWE."

"Say, you're off your base, Lew," he said, with a forced laugh. "What are you giving me? The letter a forgery! I don't understand you."

"Oh, yes, you do. The letter is not the same that Mrs. Warden gave me."

"It isn't, eh? How do you know? Have you opened it?"

"Of course I have not opened it, but I know what the superscription of the other letter looked like, and this is not the one. The forgery is a clever one, but it does not deceive me."

"If you say another word like that," blustered Harwood, "I'll knock you down!"

"Oh, no, you won't!" said Lew, quietly.

"Won't I? Well, you try it and see. But I've had all the talk I want with you, you young beggar. Excuse me!"

And he started to walk away.

But Lew laid his hand heavily on the young scoundrel's shoulder.

"Wait!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Harwood, wheeling around fiercely.

"I mean that this business has got to be settled right now and here. You know well enough that I can make trouble for you if I want to, and I shall do it if you do not return that letter to me

at once. I have friends on board this train who will help me; and you, yourself, know that I can make out a pretty strong case against you. Now, if you wish to consult your own interests you will give me that letter. If you don't, you will find yourself in pretty serious trouble before many hours have passed."

At first Harwood did not reply; he seemed buried in reflection. He could not deny the truth and force of Lew's words, and was compelled to admit, most reluctantly, that he had lost again.

He took the letter from his pocket and handed it to the boy.

"Here you are, then," he said. "Rather than have any more fuss about it you may take it. And now, give me the other."

"The other letter?" laughed Lew. "Oh, no."

"What's that?"

"I'm going to keep it as evidence against you and your fellow-conspirator—for I'm sure that this scheme is not all of your planning. Mrs. Warden will be pleased to see that letter when I return."

"Give it to me," hissed Harwood, white with rage, "or I'll choke the life out of you!"

As he spoke he seized Lew by the throat with one hand, while he attempted to thrust the other into the boy's pocket.

But the next moment a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder and he was hurled backward.

"None of that here, you young ruffian!"

Turning, Harwood found himself face to face with the burly Dr. Metcalfe, who had entered the car unseen.

"What's all this about?" continued the doctor.

"This boy has robbed me," asserted Harwood, "and I'm trying to recover my property—that's what it's about."

"That story won't wash," laughed the old man. "Miss Edith has told me something about your rascally persecution of this boy; but if she hadn't one glance at his face and at yours would be enough to satisfy any one as to who is the thief. My boy," turning to Lew, "how can I help you?"

"I don't need any help, I thank you, sir. I think this fellow and I can balance our accounts in a very short time without any assistance."

"Very good," smiled the doctor; "then I'll adjourn to a seat and smoke my morning cigar; but mind, young fellow," addressing Harwood, "if I see any more funny business like that you indulged in just now I shall take a hand in it myself; and it won't be well for you if I do."

With these words the old gentleman took a cigar from his case and walked away.

Harwood glared at our hero in silence a few moments. Then he said:

"The game is in your hands again, Lightning Lew!"

"So it seems. But I don't want to waste any more words upon you."

"You needn't. I'm no hog; I know when I've got enough. You've won the game, and that's the end of it. I shall go back to New York."

"Go where you please, only keep out of my way."

"I'll keep out of your way, never fear. But I want my money."

"Here it is—the amount due you, after deducting what you stole from me."

Harwood pocketed the roll of bills with a scowl, and turning on his heel walked away.

"Return to New York!" he muttered. "Yes, I will, my fine fellow, but not until I've settled with you."

Lew seated himself by the doctor, and inquired as to Judge Seabrooke's health.

"He's all right," replied the bluff old man—"at least he will be in a couple of days. A few square meals and a mind free from

anxiety will restore him to his former condition. His mind is clear this morning—he has just awakened—and there is no reason to apprehend any further trouble."

"He will not return home, then?"

"Oh, no; I have advised him to pursue his journey, so you will have the pleasure of his company until you reach San Francisco, and the pretty Miss Edith's, too, which will not be altogether an infliction—eh, Lew?"

Our hero could not help blushing furiously, and the old doctor laughed heartily at his embarrassment.

"The judge has taken a great fancy to you, let me tell you," he said, "and you know well enough that Miss Edith has, too; so who can tell what may happen in the future?"

The remainder of the trip was uneventful. Lew did not see Harwood again until the train had reached San Francisco, when he caught a glimpse of him hurrying out of the station.

By this time Judge Seabrooke's condition was greatly improved.

"I haven't felt so well in years," he said, "and am in first-rate form to show you all over San Francisco. Lew, my boy, I know every nook and corner of the place; and as the steamer for Yokohama does not sail for three days, you will have plenty of time to see the sights."

Impatient as he was to complete his journey, Lew thoroughly enjoyed the first two days of his stay in San Francisco.

Had he been a millionaire instead of a messenger the judge could not have been more indefatigable in his attentions; he and Edith vied with each other in their efforts to make his stay in the city one long to be remembered.

On the afternoon of the second day, while Lew was seated in the reading-room of the hotel, his attention was attracted by a few words uttered by a stylishly dressed man who had been seated near him, engaged in conversation with a friend.

"Well, good-day, Marlowe. When are you going to return to Yokohama?"

"To-morrow," was the reply.

"So soon? Well, I'll see you again before you go."

The man sauntered away, and the gentleman addressed as Marlowe arose.

Lew gazed at him curiously.

He was a fine-looking man of about forty-five, elegantly dressed and having the general appearance of a thorough man of the world.

Seeing Lew's eyes fixed upon him, he smiled slightly, and said:

"You're a New York messenger boy, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, how the mischief does it happen that you are here?"

"May I ask you a question in reply, sir?" said Lew.

"Certainly."

"Your name is Marlowe?"

"Yes, Ralph Marlowe, my boy."

"Of Yokohama?"

"Yes."

"Then, sir, I think I have a letter for you."

"A letter for me, boy?"

"Yes, from Mrs. Warden."

The stranger's face changed.

"From Eleanor? Give it to me, quick."

Lew handed him the letter.

"I will go to my room and read it," he said, evincing considerable emotion. "Remain here, and wait for me, boy."

And he hurriedly left the room.

As he did so Judge Seabrooke entered it.

"Didn't I see you talking with that man who just went out, Lew?" he asked.

"Yes, judge."

"Be careful how you make new acquaintances in that way. That fellow is a notorious adventurer, and the proprietor of the best-known faro bank in San Francisco. His name is Jack Fanshawe."

Lew sprang to his feet.

"He told me that he was Mr. Marlowe, and I have given him the letter."

"Then you'll never see it again, Lew."

"Yes, I shall," replied the boy, determinedly; "at any cost I will recover that letter before the steamer sails."

CHAPTER XXII.

HARWOOD MAKES A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

Shortly after our hero's interview with Jack Fanshawe a fashionably dressed young man strolled into the rotunda of one of San Francisco's most fashionable hotels. He looked over the people present, searching for one of his kind, and when his eye met those of Harwood he bowed affably.

"Good-day," said the other, rather crustily.

"No offense, I hope, sir?" went on the young dude.

"Not the least, sir."

"Have something with me, sir?"

"Don't care if I do, my friend," replied Harwood, thawing out slightly; for he made it a point never to refuse an offer of this kind.

"What's yours?" went on the stranger.

"A little rye, I guess."

"I'll take a soda cocktail."

"A light drink, Mr. —," said Harwood, with a scarcely perceptible sneer.

"Mr. Percival—Percy Percival," returned the dudelet. "Ya-as, it's a light drink, but I can't take strong drinks; they go to my head, you see, Mr. —"

"Jones—Montague Jones," replied Harwood, on the spur of the moment. "That's unfortunate, Mr. Percival."

"Ya-as; but I've always been that way, and so was my father before me, doncherknow."

"Indeed? Are you a resident of San Francisco, Mr. Percival?"

"No; nor are you, either," was the reply.

"How can you tell that?" asked Harwood, rather sharply.

"Oh, I've traveled, doncherknow."

"You have, eh?"

"Ya-as. You're from New York, if I'm not mistaken."

"Well, you're not. You're a sharper fellow than I took you to be."

"Oh, ya-as, I know how to use my perceptive faculties, doncherknow. But have another?"

For by this time the drinks had been brought and disposed of.

"Guess I will; but they must be on me, with your permission, Mr. Percival."

"Just as you say, Mr. Jones. What shall it be?"

"The same."

"Same for me, too, and make haste, will you, waitaw?"

By the time Harwood had disposed of his second glass of whiskey—not by any means the second he had taken that day—he had become quite loquacious.

"By Jove! I like you, old fel," he said, slapping his new acquaintance on the back.

"Aw—thanks, old man," drawled Percival.

"And when I like a man there's nothing in the world I won't do for him."

"I'm just the same, doncherknow."

"You're in 'Frisco for fun, I suppose?—no biz or anything of that sort?"

"Deah me, no! The only business I have is to circulate cash."

"Find it hard work?"

"Not particularly, me boy. Father died a yeah or so ago, and since that time I've been traveling to kill time, doncherknow."

"A good way to do it, and to get rid of your superfluous funds."

"Ya-as. You're one of the same sort, I've no doubt?"

"Well," hesitated Harwood, "not exactly—wish I was. The fact is, in my visit to San Francisco I combine business and pleasure."

"Ya-as? Waitaw, the same again!"

The drinks were placed before the two young fellows.

"You're traveling for some mercantile house, I suppose?" queried Percival.

"I came all the way from New York to get possession of a certain paper."

"Aw! And have you succeeded in getting it?"

"No, but it will be placed in my hands this very evening, by a friend who has undertaken to get hold of it. He's a devilish smart fellow, and he'll succeed."

Harwood paused suddenly as if it had just occurred to him that perhaps he was waxing too confidential.

In a moment he resumed, in a changed tone:

"Have you seen the sights of the city, Mr. Percival?"

"Oh, ya-as," responded the dudelet, "I've been the rounds pretty well, doncherknow; but there's one thing I haven't seen, because I don't happen to have the inside track."

"What's that, my dear fellow?"

"One of San Francisco's palatial gambling hells. I've been told that the city is celebrated for them, doncherknow."

"You're right."

"I've a few hundred that I shouldn't mind dropping in one of them if luck happened to be against me, just for the fun of seeing the place and the people. I'm a great student of human nature, doncherknow."

"You are, eh?" smiled Harwood. "Well, old fel, if that's your favorite study I can give you a chance to pursue it just in the way you want to."

"I don't understand you, deah boy."

"I'll explain. I have the *entrée* to the leading faro bank in 'Frisco—Jack Fanshawe's."

"And you'll introduce me, deah boy?"

"Sure. I'm going there this very night."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. The fact is, Jack Fanshawe is the man who is going to get that paper for me, and I am to go there for it to-night. He and I happened to meet when he was in New York a year ago, and I was lucky enough to be able to do him a service. He has never forgotten it, and he'll do anything for me. I'll take you there to-night and you can drop all the money you like."

CHAPTER XXIII.

GILDED VICE.

Young Percy Percival seized his companion's hand and shook it with an appearance of great warmth.

"My deah boy, I'm awfully obliged to you, doncherknow!"

"Oh, that's all right."

"It's deucedly lucky I met you."

"Perhaps you won't think so after you've been to Fanshawe's," laughed Harwood.

"Why not, deah boy?"

"Suppose you lose your little pile?"

"Oh, that'll be all right. I'm a thoroughbred, and I nevah squeal—nevah. Besides, I shahn't take any more with me than I'm willing to lose."

"A good scheme. Well, meet me here at nine to-night, and I'll steer you around to Fanshawe's."

"At nine sharp I'll be here. Ta, ta, deah boy!"

"Good-by, old fel."

Percival walked away.

"Seems to be a decent sort, but a little mushy in the top story," mused Harwood, looking after his late companion. "Well, Jack'll thank me for bringing him around, for if I'm not mistaken he'll prove a fowl worth picking."

He would have changed his opinion of Mr. Percy Percival if he had seen the altered expression on that youth's face when he reached the street.

"So far so good, Mr. Alfred Harwood, alias Montague Jones," the dude muttered. "We'll see if I can't take a hand in that little game of yours to-night that will surprise you slightly."

At precisely nine o'clock that evening Percival entered the reading-room, where he was joined a few minutes later by Harwood, who was evidently considerably under the influence of liquor.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, old fel," he said, with a tipsy leer, "but I met a party of friends, and they kept me drinking—know how it is yourself. Are you ready?"

"All ready."

"Then here we go."

"Got your paper yet, deah boy?" asked Percival, as they walked down Montgomery Street, arm in arm.

"What paper?"

"Why, the one that Fanshawe was to give you."

"No. I told you I was going to get it to-night. Why do you ask?"

"Aw—merely curiosity."

"It's just as well not to be too curious in such cases," said Harwood, significantly.

"If you're not more lucky in your betting at Fanshawe's you'll come out with empty pockets, old fel, for it's not a will."

"Aw!"

"No, it's only a letter, which is of no value to any one but myself."

"A lettah? Ah, a compromising love-lettah! I see! But it's none of my business, as you've very politely told me, so we'll say no more about it. Is it much further to Fanshawe's?"

"Only a few steps. Have you got much chink about you?"

"A couple of hundred."

"Is that all?"

"It's enough to drop, I fahncy. But where are you going, deah boy?"

"This is the way to Fanshawe's—and here it is."

As he spoke he entered a doorway and began groping up a flight of stairs, so dimly lighted that he and Percival, who followed him closely, had to almost feel their way.

Arriving at the head of the staircase, he gave a peculiar knock upon a door which barred their further progress.

After a lapse of perhaps half a minute a panel was withdrawn and a voice inquired:

"Who's there?"

"Friends of the right stamp," replied Harwood, in a low tone.

There was a sound as of the withdrawing of bolts, and then the door was opened, and they were admitted by a burly, black-mustached fellow into a narrow, dark hallway.

They were obliged to pass through another door, which was

thrown open in response to a password, and they entered the most magnificently furnished gambling house on the Pacific Coast.

Everything was of the most gorgeous and costly description.

The carpet had evidently been woven expressly for the floor it covered; the furniture was selected with the most exquisite taste and was of the finest material and workmanship; the halls were covered with rare paintings, many of them of priceless value.

At a number of tables in different parts of the room were seated men of all ages, many in evening dress wooing the fickle goddess, Fortune; but the chief interest seemed to be centered in a table at one end of the apartment around which were seated a dozen or more men, in the eyes of most of whom was that eager, intent look that characterizes the gambler.

The whole place was illumined with electricity, and formed a scene of dazzling splendor never to be forgotten.

"Takes your breath away, eh, old fel? This lays 'way over anything we've got, or ever had, in New York. Oh, 'Frisco's a great place," said Harwood.

Percival followed him.

As they approached the table the dealer gave Harwood a nod of recognition.

The young fellow bent over and whispered in his ear:

"I'm Montague Jones to-night, Jack."

"Good enough. Who's your friend?"

"A young pigeon I caught to-day, and he's worth picking, I guess—got a couple of hundred in his clothes."

"All right, but this is a square game, my boy. There'll be a couple of chairs vacant in a minute."

"Very good. Got the paper?"

"Oh, yes; I'll tell you how I got hold of it later."

While speaking, the gambler had continued to deal. Not for a moment had he permitted his attention to be taken away from the game.

"Here it is," he added, taking from his pocket the letter which he had received from Lew, and handing it to Harwood.

"Jack, you're my best friend," whispered the young fellow, enthusiastically. "I'll give you the hundred I promised you for this job before I leave."

"Good enough, my boy."

Harwood returned to his new-found friend.

"Got your letter, I see," remarked Percival, in a lazy drawl.

"Yes."

"I suppose you feel better now, eh?"

"Decidedly, my boy."

"By Jove! I'm more curious than ever about that letter, doncherknow."

"Here are two seats, gentlemen," called out Fanshawe at this point.

Two of the players had risen, and, with pale, set features, which told of heavy losses, were hurrying away from the table.

"Come on, old fel," said Harwood. "Let's see you break the bank."

They seated themselves.

"Aw! It's the first time I ever played, doncherknow, deah boy," drawled Percival.

"Then you're sure to win."

"I don't know much about the game."

"Oh, I'll give you all the points you want."

Percival glanced around him, and an expression almost of disgust appeared upon his features.

And no wonder.

Opposite him sat an old, white-bearded man, whose trembling hands could scarcely manipulate the chips which represented

money, whose bloodshot eyes gazed eagerly, almost despairingly, upon the imperturbable dealer.

By his side was seated a boy of scarcely eighteen, his face flushed with drink, gambling away, perhaps, his employer's money, and laying the foundation of a career of crime.

These two were types of the rest. The features of all wore the same set, strained expression; the same dreadful fascination controlled them all.

Whatever were Percival's thoughts, he said nothing.

He proved an apt pupil, as Harwood was soon forced to admit, for in less than half an hour he had won nearly fifteen hundred dollars.

On the other hand, Harwood lost steadily and heavily.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed presently, wiping the beads of perspiration from his brow, "I've got about enough of this."

"Weakening, eh, deah boy?" said Percival, calmly.

"Weakening! I should say so. Why, I've only got fifty dollars left. I never did have any luck at faro. I'll quit; but don't let me take you away."

"Oh, I've had enough, too," returned Percival, rising. "I fahncy it's a good time for me to stop."

"Well," said Harwood, half admiringly, as they walked away from the table, "you are a cool one. I had an idea that you'd lose your head as soon as you got started in the game."

"Oh, no, deah boy; I never permit myself to get excited."

"So I see. Well, I say!"

"What is it, deah boy?"

"Suppose we have a quiet little game of poker all by ourselves, the stakes to be the fifty-dollar bill that I've got left, against a similar amount from your pile?"

"I'm with you, deah boy; but I don't know much about pokah."

"Oh, I'll teach you all you'll want to know."

"Very good, old man."

They seated themselves at one of the small tables and began the game at once.

Again fortune favored Percival.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the loser, "this is tough! Here I am, a stranger in a strange land, and strapped!"

"Ya-as," admitted Percival, quietly, "it is rather rough, deah boy. Don't you want satisfaction?"

"Satisfaction! How am I going to get it? I tell you I haven't a cent left."

"So you said before," drawled the dude. "But, do you know, I have a funny ideah."

"What sort of an idea, old fel?"

"Oh, it'll make you laugh, Jones; but when I get a notion into my head it always sticks. You've got that letter?"

"Yes."

"Well, deah boy, I'll put up a hundred dollars against it. What do you say?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"YOU CAN'T GO YET."

Harwood gazed at his companion a moment in speechless astonishment. Then he burst into a loud laugh.

"Are you crazy?" he asked.

"I think not, deah boy," said Percival, languidly.

"What the mischief is that letter to you?"

"Nothing in particular, Jones, my boy; only, as I told you, I feel curious about it, and if I'm willing to pay a hundred dollars to satisfy my curiosity, why need you object?"

"But there's more in this than I understand. You're not going to risk a hundred dollars for nothing. See here, who are you, and what is that letter to you?"

And he glared upon his new friend in a suspicious and decidedly ugly manner.

But Percival met his gaze with an expression as innocent as that of a new-born babe.

"My deah boy," he said, "you bore me—'pon honah, you do. Who am I? Why, I'm Percy Percival, of New York, at your service. What is that letter to me? Well, I've taken a fahncy to know its contents, and as I've no business of my own to attend to, I'm willing to pay for the privilege of knowing a little of yours."

Harwood made no reply, but sat gazing frowningly at the carpet.

"What is a hundred dollars to me, deah boy?" continued Percival. "Nothing—simply nothing! And I give you my word of honah that I won't divulge the contents of that letter to a living soul. But do as you please—I don't care. By Jove! I'm quite weary arguing with you. Better keep your letter, perhaps, after all."

Just at this moment Fanshawe, whose place at the faro table had been taken by an assistant, stepped up to Harwood and tapped him on the shoulder.

"A word with you, Jones."

"Certainly. Excuse me a moment, Mr. Percival."

"All right, deah boy."

When Harwood and the gambler were out of the dude's hearing, Fanshawe said:

"Now, Alf, I'll trouble you for that hundred."

"I—er—the fact is, I've dropped every cent I had."

"The deuce you have!" said the gambler, with a scowl.

"I'm giving it to you straight, Jack; I—"

"Now see here," interrupted Fanshawe, "this sort of thing don't go with me. You offered me a hundred to do a little job that you thought me fitted for. Partly for the fun of the thing, partly because I wanted the hundred, and partly because you once did me a slight service, I agreed. I did the job, and now you want to sneak out of your bargain."

"You wrong me, old man—you do, indeed. I had the money in my pocket when I came into this place, but I've lost every cent of it."

"That don't go, I tell you. I'm not as flush as I look, Harwood. All these things that you see around you cost money. The bank's been doing a losing biz lately; that old man on the other side of the table has made more money to-night than I have for a week. I have to pay big money for police protection—and mighty shaky my position is in that direction just now—and I tell you an extra hundred would come more handy at this moment than you imagine."

"I'm sorry, Jack; but, as I told you, I haven't a red."

"No, but you have that young fellow with you," returned the gambler, meaningly.

"Humph! Well, I'll see you in half an hour or less, and I think I can give you the money then."

"Good enough. See that you do. I don't want you to leave this place until I am paid up. See?"

And the gambler strode away.

Harwood returned to the table where Percival sat awaiting him, apparently in a semi-dozed.

"Old fel!" he began, insinuatingly.

"Well, deah boy?"

"Lend me a hundred."

"Lend you a hundred, deah boy!"

"That's what I said."

"I'm awfully sorry, deah boy, but I can't do it—can't, really."

"Why can't you?"

"Because it's against my principles ever to lend money. Fact

is, I promised my father on his dying bed that I never would, and you know it wouldn't do to break my word."

"Rats!"

"Fact, deah boy, 'pon honah. But I'll tell you what I will do."

"What?"

"Why, give you a chance to win the hundred."

"By putting up that letter against it?"

"Ya-as."

Harwood reflected.

After all, he asked himself, what harm could there be in letting this fellow have his way in this matter? He was a perfect stranger to all the persons interested; it seemed the most unlikely thing in the world that his possession of the letter could do any harm. Besides, he might not win it.

"Well," he said, turning to Percival at last, "I agree. But I warn you of one thing."

"What is that, deah boy?"

"I shall have the grand laugh on you when you get the letter, if you do get it, for I tell you frankly you'll find it a very poor hundred dollars' worth."

"I can't credit that statement, old chappie," smiled Percival, "for if it were of no value you wouldn't have come all the way to San Francisco to get hold of it. But, nevah mind—if I find that I don't get my money's worth, I won't squeal. Now, deah boy, are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Then let 'er go."

The game was a short one, and resulted in Percival's favor.

The dude smilingly pocketed the letter, which had been placed upon the table with a hundred-dollar bill.

"You're in hard luck to-night, deah boy," he said. "But you'll do better next time. As for the letter, I'll read it when I get back to my hotel."

"Let's have another game," said Harwood, hoarsely. "Here—I'll put up my watch and chain—they're worth at least two hundred—against another hundred."

"No, deah boy, you've played enough, and so have I."

"But you've no right to refuse me satisfaction."

"Another time, deah boy."

At this moment Harwood saw Fanshawe beckoning to him from the other side of the room.

He hurried over to him, asking:

"What is it?"

"You're a fly chap, aren't you?" asked the gambler, in a tone of disgust.

"What do you mean?" demanded the startled youth.

"What did you say the name of that friend of yours was?"

"Percival."

"How long have you known him?"

"Only a few hours."

"Just so. Met him at your hotel, I suppose, didn't you?"

"Yes. What are you driving at, Fanshawe?"

"Is it possible that you don't suspect who he is?"

"Explain yourself, will you? Is he a detective?"

"No. I thought when I stood over by your table that there was something very familiar in his face, but I couldn't exactly place him."

"And have you done so now?"

"Cert. I've been standing here studying his features for the last ten minutes. I never forget a face that I've once seen; and although he's well disguised, I know him."

"You've seen him before?"

"Once."

"And who is he?"

"The boy I got the letter from. Lightning Lew!"

"What?"

"Don't raise such a racket. That's who he is. Just study his face, and you'll see for yourself."

"By Jove! you are right."

"Of course I'm right."

"But see! he's getting up to go. Fanshawe, he must not leave this place."

"I'll see that he don't."

Stepping quickly to the door, which Lew had by this time reached, Fanshawe said, placing a hand upon the boy's shoulder:

"Hold on, youngster; you can't go yet!"

CHAPTER XXV.

"ALL ABOARD!"

When Fanshawe stopped Lew from leaving the place, the gambling house was in an uproar.

Our hero, undaunted, stepped back and then suddenly drawing a revolver aimed it at the gambler's head. Then he said, in a voice that never shook:

"Open the door or I'll fire!"

Fanshawe fairly gasped for breath, so astonished was he at this unexpected exhibition of pluck.

A silence like that of death reigned for a few moments.

There was not a man in the room who would have dared do what our hero had done, and all felt that he would pay for his rashness with his life.

As he recovered from his astonishment, Fanshawe, with an inconceivably quick movement, drew a revolver from his hip pocket.

The next instant two reports rang through the room.

Fanshawe's bullet whistled past Lew's ear and imbedded itself in the wall behind him.

The gambler uttered a cry of rage as his pistol-arm dropped nerveless to his side; the bullet from the boy's revolver had struck him in the right shoulder.

He sprang toward Lew, and the boy saw murder in his eye.

An instant later a shrill whistle sounded outside the door.

Fanshawe uttered a curse.

"The police! Out with the lights—quick! Open the rear door."

Before the excited servants whom he addressed could extinguish the lights, the door was burst open and a party of police rushed into the room.

And when the rear door, which was designed as a means of escape in just such emergencies as this, was thrown open, an officer stood there.

With a cry almost like that of a wild beast at bay, Fanshawe sprang upon him, at the same moment drawing a keen-edged knife.

But before he could use the weapon he was seized by a couple of the officers and a pair of handcuffs clasped upon his wrists.

"Curse you, handle me more gently," he hissed, his lips white with pain. "Don't you see that I am wounded?"

"That's all right, Fanshawe," said the captain. "You were not so badly hurt but that you could and would have plunged that knife in my breast if my men had not rescued me. The less you say the better, my fine fellow—remember that."

The gambler evidently considered the suggestion a good one, for he remained silent; but the look with which he regarded the captain boded that official no good in the case the tables ever turned and an opportunity for revenge presented itself.

In the meantime the utmost commotion prevailed. When they

recovered from their first panic, the gamblers, who largely outnumbered the officers, showed some signs of resistance.

But these indications ceased when the clear, authoritative voice of the police captain rang through the room:

"Let all present consider themselves under arrest. The best thing you can do is to submit quietly—the alternative will not be a pleasant one, I warn you."

Then, turning to Lew, he regarded him attentively, saying:

"You are a stranger here?"

"I am," replied the boy, quietly; "I came here with a good purpose, which has been accomplished. I am satisfied to go with you—I can prove what I have said."

The officer made no reply; but turning to his men, issued a few orders, which were promptly obeyed.

Half an hour later our hero was the occupant of a cell in the — Precinct police station, and as luck would have it, Harwood shared it also.

"Well, here we are again," said the young fellow, apparently in high good-humor; "it's all in a lifetime—eh, Lew, old man?"

The boy turned away without replying.

"Now, don't act that way. You have the biggest luck on record, and it's no use my fighting against it. I give in, old chap; you played your part well, and you deserve your victory. Shake!"

"What!" exclaimed the boy, sharply.

"Well, don't snap a fellow's head off! I say, shake, and let's call the feud off."

"You are the most cowardly scoundrel I ever met. Nothing would induce me to touch your hand," said Lew.

"Oh, ho!" sneered the young fellow; "so that's your tack, is it? It still remains war to the knife, does it?"

Lew made no reply; and after a few more remarks of a similar nature, Harwood threw himself upon the bed and relapsed into silence.

No sleep visited our hero's eyes that night.

At an early hour in the morning he sent word of what had happened to Judge Seabrooke, who, in company with Dr. Metcalfe, came to see him within an hour.

"It was a foolhardy enterprise, Lew," said the judge, reproachfully. "You should not have undertaken it."

"I am not sorry, sir," responded the boy, smilingly, "for I have succeeded."

"You have got the letter?"

"I have."

"I congratulate you, my boy."

"By Jove!" exclaimed the doctor, "you're a smart young fellow, Lew. But you'll have earned your money when you deliver that letter. I wouldn't spend a night in a cell with that cub," scowling at Harwood, "for a good-sized fortune."

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, old man. You wouldn't dare speak to me in that tone if we were on the same side of the bars," growled Harwood.

The excitable old doctor gasped for breath.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I'll show you whether I would or not when you get out. I——"

"That'll do, Metcalfe," interrupted Judge Seabrooke; "the fellow isn't worth any attention on your part. And now, my boy," addressing Lew, "I've something to tell you. The steamer for Yokohama starts at half-past ten."

"At half-past ten, sir!" exclaimed Lew, in consternation.

"Yes; and court does not open until ten o'clock. You'll have a close shave, but don't be discouraged; I think you can do it. I am acquainted with the judge, and I think I can induce him to settle this business in quick order. Undoubtedly you and most of

the others will be discharged at once, and you may be in time to catch the steamer. And now, Lew, I have a surprise for you."

"A surprise, sir?"

"Yes; Dr. Metcalfe, here, advises a sea voyage for me, and Edith and I are going with you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the old doctor. "That pleases him—see how the boy blushes! By Jove, Seabrooke, I had an idea of becoming a suitor for Miss Edith's hand myself, but I shall have to resign in Lew's favor."

Judge Seabrooke's influence made it possible for Lew, Dr. Metcalfe and himself to breakfast together in a private room in the station house; while Harwood was forced to content himself with very scanty rations in his cell, much to his disgust.

The case was called at ten o'clock precisely; and a few minutes later Lew and most of the other prisoners, Harwood included, were discharged.

"Now, then," said the judge, taking our hero by the arm. "all aboard for Yokohama!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON THE PACIFIC.

"Do you think we shall catch the steamer?" asked Lew, excitedly.

"Certainly," replied the judge, smilingly. "Keep cool, my boy."

"But if we should miss it——"

"We shall not miss it. Edith is already on board, and so is all the baggage. I have even had your valise taken from the hotel to the steamer. Staterooms are engaged, and the captain—an old friend of mine—has promised to hold the vessel a reasonable length of time for us; but it will not be necessary for him to do so, for we shall be on time."

They were. They found Edith anxiously awaiting them.

"Oh, dear Lew!" she cried, as they stepped upon the steamer's deck; "I am so glad!"

Blushing like a peony, Lew took her little outstretched hand in his own, and stammered out a few words, he scarcely knew what.

The current of their thoughts was suddenly changed.

"Look!" cried Edith. "See, Lew, who is coming up the gang-plank!"

Our hero gazed in the direction indicated, and, to his astonishment and anger, saw, ascending the gang-plank, a richly dressed, middle-aged woman leaning upon Harwood's arm.

The young fellow did not so much as glance at Lew as he passed, but the lady stared at him haughtily through a pair of gold-mounted eyeglasses.

"Who the mischief is that woman with him?" exclaimed the judge. "I'll go and inquire. If I'm not mistaken, there's some new devilry afoot."

And he hurried away. In a few moments he returned.

"The purser tells me that the couple are mother and son. The woman looks shrewder than the youth. Lew, my boy, you'll have to keep your eyes open; these schemers have not let up on you yet."

But Lew only laughed and said:

"I think I can hold my own, Judge Seabrooke."

In the meantime Alfred Harwood and his mother were seated in a corner of the cabin, conversing excitedly in low tones.

"Now, then, that we have a chance to get our breath," said the young fellow, coarsely, "let me ask you what in thunder you have followed me for?"

"That is a rather unnecessary question, Alfred," replied his mother. "You have failed in this business most ignominiously."

Nothing could have been worse than your management of the affair from the beginning."

"I've had hard luck, that's all," grumbled Harwood.

"It's too late now to merely rob him of the letter. What good would that do us? No, he must be prevented from seeing Ralph Marlowe at all—he must disappear."

"You mean that he must be put out of the way?"

"Hush! Not so loud. I did not say that. If he should disappear during the voyage the letter would disappear with him. On the arrival of the steamer at Yokohama I should visit Ralph Marlowe myself with a carefully prepared story; and rest assured he and Eleanor Warden would never meet, and her money would soon be mine—ours."

"You mean to take this matter into your own hands, eh?"

"I do."

"Well, good luck to you! You could have knocked me down with a feather when I found you waiting for me when I came out of the courtroom."

"Your letters made me uneasy. I saw that you were managing the affair in a manner that was almost sure to lead not only to the failure of our plans, but their exposure. Things have got to such a point—partly through your mismanagement—that we could not abandon the scheme even if we wished to do so. We must go on—and we shall succeed."

"We shall see," replied Harwood; "but I warn you you've got a tough job ahead of you."

A moment later Judge Seabrooke, Edith and Lew passed them, but neither betrayed the slightest consciousness of their presence, even by a look.

Mrs. Harwood ground her teeth with rage.

"You will see a difference before this voyage is ended," she said. "Oh, why did I leave this affair in your hands?"

And, without waiting for a reply from the mortified and angry youth, she swept away to her stateroom.

The first few days of the voyage were uneventful.

Lew and his companions were somewhat surprised to observe that Harwood and his mother avoided rather than sought them.

"But don't let that mislead you as to their purpose," said the old judge to our hero. "Depend upon it, you will hear from them before you are many days older. Keep your eyes open."

There was one of the passengers about whom the others indulged in much speculation. This was a Mrs. Ainsworth—a tall, handsome woman of perhaps thirty-seven or eight years.

This lady, who was dressed in the garb of a widow, and was usually heavily veiled, kept aloof from the rest of the passengers.

The only person with whom she held any conversation during the entire voyage was our hero, and the circumstances of their first interview may be here recorded.

It was on the fourth day of the voyage that Lew, while seated in the cabin, observed the eyes of this lady fixed steadfastly upon him.

A few minutes later he was surprised, almost startled, to see her arise and approach him.

Seating herself by his side, and fixing her large, dark eyes upon his face, she said:

"May I ask you a few questions, my boy?"

"Questions upon what subject, ma'am?"

"Questions about yourself."

"About myself, Mrs. Ainsworth!"

"Ah, you know my name? But I do not know yours, and it is one thing I would ask you."

"You wish to know my name?" hesitated Lew.

"Yes, yes!"

"It is Halstead—Lew Halstead."

"My God!"

The lady pressed her hand to her heart, and her face assumed a ghastly pallor.

Lew sprang to his feet with the intention of summoning assistance, but Mrs. Ainsworth detained him with a gesture.

"Do not go," she said, faintly; "I am subject to these attacks. You say your name is Lew Halstead?"

"It is the only name I can lay claim to, Mrs. Ainsworth."

"I understand," said the lady, in a low tone. "You are a foundling."

"I am."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Ainsworth, almost in a whisper, "I know more of your history than you imagine."

"You, madam?"

"You were left at the door of a house on Twenty-fifth Street, occupied by a family who adopted you and gave you their name."

"I was!" cried the boy, in a thrilling voice. "Oh, madam, you know more, you can tell me who my parents are, you—"

"Hush!" interrupted Mrs. Ainsworth, faintly. "I can say no more now. Some day perhaps I may—nay, I promise you I will, but not now—not now. I could not bear the excitement; it would kill me, and I must live until I have seen him and gained his forgiveness. Boy!"

"Yes, Mrs. Ainsworth?"

"I must not lose sight of you again. It is true that I possess the secret of your life. That secret I will reveal, but the time for that revelation has not yet come. When all is ready you shall hear the whole story. Until then, wait and be patient. Will you do as I bid you?"

"I—have no alternative," said Lew, hesitatingly.

"Another thing—not one word of what has passed between us to a living soul—not a word!"

And the mysterious woman arose, and, drawing her veil closely about her, hurried away.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AND LAST.

Lew meditated long and earnestly upon this singular interview. He was strongly tempted to consult Judge Seabrooke on the subject, but upon consideration he decided to respect Mrs. Ainsworth's injunction, and so said nothing.

During the voyage he had two other interviews with the lady; but though he pleaded with her earnestly to reveal the secret she possessed, she steadfastly refused to do so until Yokohama was reached.

"Then," she said, "you shall know all as soon as I have seen one whom I must consult in the matter."

The days passed slowly enough for Lew, who felt that a crisis in his life was approaching, and whose impatience to know the truth was almost unbearable.

On the night of the fourteenth day of the voyage, he stood alone upon the deck, gazing at the dark waters and wondering what strange revelation was in store for him.

A veiled woman approached him with stealthy, cat-like tread.

Had the boy been less preoccupied than he was he would not have heard her, for her footsteps made no sound.

"A moment, and it will be over!" she panted, breathlessly, pressing her hand upon her heart as if to still its beating. "Just one little moment, and the fortune will be mine!"

She stood so close to Lew that her hot breath almost fanned his cheek, but he remained unconscious of her presence.

The next instant, summoning all her strength, she gave the boy a violent push.

He would have been precipitated into the ocean, and his fate would in all probability have ever remained a mystery; but at that moment another female figure darted out of the darkness with inconceivable rapidity and seized him in her arms.

"Mrs. Ainsworth!" exclaimed Lew, in bewilderment. "Who—what—"

The woman whose attempt at murder we have witnessed was about to glide away as silently as she had come, but Mrs. Ainsworth seized her arm.

"Wretch!" she cried. "Who are you?"

As she spoke she attempted to tear the veil from the face of the would-be murderess.

But the unknown was her superior in strength and shook her off, and the next moment had disappeared in the darkness.

Both Mrs. Ainsworth and Lew followed her, but she had succeeded in effecting her escape.

When the occurrence was related to Judge Seabrooke, the bluff old man said:

"It was that she-cat, Mrs. Harwood—take my word for it. I'll accuse her of the crime myself, and see what she has to say in defense."

He did so, but—as he had anticipated—was met with a haughty and indignant denial of the charge.

Two days later the steamer reached Yokohama.

Our hero at once hurried to the office of Mr. Marlowe.

He was fortunate enough to find the gentleman alone. Ralph Marlowe was a tall, fine-looking man of perhaps forty, whose dark hair was already streaked with gray, and the lines upon whose face gave evidence of deep mental suffering.

He hurriedly tore open the letter, which Lew handed him and scanned its contents.

Then he buried his face in his hands and remained motionless for some minutes.

At last he looked up, and Lew saw that his eyes were wet with tears.

"My boy," he said, "you know the contents of this letter? Mrs. Warden must have confided in you to some extent, or she would not have intrusted the epistle to you."

"She did, sir," replied our hero, quietly, and he informed the gentleman of what Mrs. Warden had told him.

Mr. Marlowe arose and began pacing the room.

"My boy," he said, "I am placed in a terrible position. Mrs. Warden did not tell you all. My wife, her sister, deserted me a few months after our marriage. Some time later a report of her death reached me. For years I believed it true; but I have recently received evidence which forces me to the conclusion that she still lives. Where she is I know not; but what reply can I make to this letter under such circumstances?"

He was interrupted by a sharp rap upon the door.

In response to his "Come in," a clerk entered.

"A lady to see you, sir. She says that her business is of the utmost importance, and will admit of no delay."

"Well, show her in," said Mr. Marlowe, after a moment's consideration. "My boy," he added, addressing Lew, "step into yonder anteroom; I shall doubtless be disengaged very soon."

Our hero obeyed. The next moment a lady entered Mr. Marlowe's private office.

Throwing aside her heavy crape veil, she sank down at her companion's feet, exclaiming:

"Ralph!"

To his amazement, Lew recognized the voice as that of Mrs. Ainsworth.

"My God!" exclaimed Mr. Marlowe. "Alice, my wife!"

"Yes, your wife, who has come back to beg forgiveness before she dies."

"You are greatly changed, Alice," said the gentleman, hoarsely.

"Yes, yes," cried his companion; "seventeen years of misery and remorse have done their work. But you do not take me in your arms! Ralph, Ralph, will you not receive me back?"

"Impossible!" cried Marlowe. "You do not know what you ask."

"You must—you shall!" almost shrieked the woman. "For our child's sake you shall!"

"Our child!" exclaimed the unhappy man, recoiling.

"Yes, our child, who was born a few months after I left you, and whom I deserted. You never knew of his existence, but he still lives, Ralph, a noble boy. For his sake you will pardon and receive me, will you not?"

"Where is the boy?" asked Marlowe.

"Here—in this city. He is known as Lewis Halstead."

Our hero, who had overheard every word of this conversation, could bear no more. Rushing from the anteroom he cried, in a thrilling voice:

"Father—mother!"

The next moment he was locked in his father's arms.

Mrs. Marlowe arose to her feet.

"Lew, my boy," she cried, faintly, "one word, one kiss—I—"

The next moment she had fallen, silent and motionless, into her son's arms.

Mr. Marlowe bent over her.

"My God!" he cried, "it is all over. She is dead!"

Our story is almost told.

In a few weeks Ralph Marlowe had closed up his affairs in Yokohama, and was on his way back to his native land with his son, our hero, Lightning Lew.

We wish that we could administer poetical justice to our villains; but, as this story is founded on fact, we cannot. Mrs. Harwood met a wealthy old English merchant in Yokohama, who had the bad taste to fall in love with her. She married him, and both she and her son are at the present time living in Yokohama, in the enjoyment of every luxury.

A year after the events just related—five years ago—Ralph Marlowe and Eleanor Warden were married. Their union has proved a happy one in all respects.

The other morning the writer of these lines attended a wedding breakfast. The company was not what could be called a particularly aristocratic one, for it was made up principally of messenger boys and graduates from the ranks whom the bridegroom had known when he was one of them. But the utmost good feeling prevailed, and all present joined in showering congratulations and good wishes upon the pretty bride, the daughter of Judge Seabrooke, and the handsome and happy groom, Lightning Lew.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 33, will contain "Upright and Honest; or, Harry Hale's Struggle to Success," by Henry Harrison Haines. This is a story of a young fellow who, through sheer pluck and honesty, fought his way up from poverty to wealth. He made many enemies doing so, and he had some terrible struggles with some of them. Read the story.

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